PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-FOURTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1995–96

COMPRISING PERIOD
9 January—19 January 1996

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9 January 1996

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 27 APRIL 1992]

FORTY-FOURTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 269**

THIRD VOLUME OF SESSION 1995–96

House of Commons

Tuesday 9 January 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

NEW WRIT

For Hemsworth, in the room of Derek Anthony Enright Esq., deceased.—[*Mr. Dewar.*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

British-USA Co-operation

1. **Mr. Merchant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met the United States Secretary of Defence to discuss British-United States of America defence co-operation. [6338]

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence last met the United States Defence Secretary at the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation defence planning committee meeting in Brussels on 29 November. He will be visiting Washington again shortly.

Mr. Merchant: First, I wish you a happy new year, Madam Speaker. Secondly, I ask my hon. Friend whether when the Secretary of State next meets his American counterpart he will stress the paramount importance to Britain of the United States-British defence relationship, as demonstrated by our excellent co-operation in Bosnia through the implementation force and on general intelligence matters.

Mr. Soames: I also wish you a very happy new year, Madam Speaker—as indeed do all wings of the Tory party. The transatlantic relationship is, and continues to be, of paramount importance to the United Kingdom defence effort. It is based on a shared world outlook and a commitment to common fundamental values.

As my hon. Friend correctly points out, the current peace implementation is the latest example of co-operation between our two countries. It also demonstrates the importance of the United States to European defence, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing that fact to the attention of the House.

Mr. Llew Smith: Will the Minister inform the House of the total cost to the taxpayer and to the environment of the Trident programme—which was purchased from the United States—during its planned operating life?

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement will answer a question about the Trident programme later. Suffice it to say that the Trident programme represents a remarkable achievement by the Royal Navy, coming in within budget and on time. It is a wonder of technical engineering.

Mr. Bill Walker: When my hon. Friend next meets his American friends, will he remind them that co-operation between the United Kingdom and the United States on nuclear matters has brought about the demise of the Soviet regime and the fall of the Berlin wall? The deployment of cruise missiles contributed massively to those outcomes, just as Trident is contributing to world peace today.

Mr. Soames: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend, who is right to draw the matter to the attention of the House. He will recall the Labour party's opposition to stationing cruise missiles in the United Kingdom, which significantly dented the Soviet Union's resolve to carry on. We clearly cannot accept anything that risks

weakening NATO or the transatlantic link. NATO is the most successful defence alliance in history and it remains the bedrock of our European security.

Mr. David Hart

2. **Mr. Betts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the role of Mr. David Hart in his Department's financial efficiency schemes. [6339]

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. James Arbuthnot): Mr. Hart's unpaid advice has made a valuable contribution at the Ministry of Defence, including to the defence costs study and to our continuing search for greater efficiency.

Mr. Betts: The Minister did not sound very confident about that answer. Is not the whole affair just another example of serious lack of judgment on the part of the Secretary of State for Defence? Given Mr. Hart's expressed views about buying our defence equipment from abroad and the role that he is obviously playing in the efficiency studies within the Department, will the Minister assure us that Mr. Hart's activities will in no way reduce further the capabilities of the Royal Air Force? Will the Minister also give an assurance that Mr. Hart's activities will not lead to a threat to the future of the Eurofighter project?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am extremely confident; unfortunately, I am also voiceless. The capabilities of Mr. Hart are considerable, and as I have said, he contributed significantly to the defence costs study. That will shortly save the Ministry of Defence over £1 billion every year.

Sir Anthony Grant: Will my hon. Friend seek the advice of Mr. Hart on the financial efficiency of the bid by Land-Rover Marshalls for the ambulances required by the MOD? Will my hon. Friend discuss with Mr. Hart the rather more expensive bid by a foreign country—namely, Austria?

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend is more ingenious than ever. I congratulate him on his advocacy for his constituency, which I knew he would produce, because he always does. Unfortunately, I must tell him that no decision has yet been made on the ambulance procurement issue.

Dr. Reid: Is it not true that, under the Secretary of State and his advisers, we have a new slogan for the Ministry of Defence—"If it's British military heritage, sell it; if it's foreign military hardware, buy it"? Does the Minister believe that that is efficient? Will he explain to the Secretary of State, when he returns from his jaunt to Japan, and to his advisers that operational effectiveness is the only way to judge efficiency for the armed forces?

The morale of the British armed forces is undermined every time this free-market Secretary of State and his free-market fanatic adviser take a decision. Does it make any sense to have people running the Ministry of Defence who know the price of everything and the value of nothing?

Mr. Arbuthnot: No. The hon. Member is pursuing a canard. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, that is foreign. He based his question on the recent, incorrect suggestion that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had been involved in selling off Admiralty arch. It has never been the Government's intention to sell off Admiralty arch, and it is not now. The problem is that it is insufficiently occupied. We intend to keep it in the public sector, and to ensure that it is well and properly occupied.

Mr. Forman: Since the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) appears to know more about Mr. David Hart than many of the rest of us, will my hon. Friend consider placing a copy of his biographical details in the Library?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I would not wish to put a copy of the biographical details of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) in the Library, because they would not bear reading.

Army Recruitment Costs

4. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average amount spent on recruitment costs for each entrant to the Army in the most recent 12 months for which figures are available. [6341]

Mr. Soames: During 1994-95, the average cost of an entrant to the Army was £4,638. That figure does not include the significant recruiting efforts made by individual regiments for which costs are not held centrally.

Mr. Flynn: Can the Minister explain why the Government spent £1 billion in redundancy costs, forcing—against their will, in most cases—137,000 people out of the armed forces? Those people were fully trained and fit. At the same time, in 1994, every recruit to the RAF cost £26,000. So the Government spent £1 billion getting rid of people, and £1.25 billion replacing them. Can we rest in our beds at night knowing that the people who are responsible for that enormous calamity and waste are in charge of the defence of the realm?

Mr. Soames: The hon. Gentleman is confusing a number of separate issues. There are difficulties with recruiting at the moment, and recruiting to the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force is expensive. The reason for that is that, although the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force do not at the moment require large numbers of recruits, for obvious reasons they need to retain a viable, satisfactory and operational recruiting service. The Army spends rather less on recruiting because it has more people coming through its books the whole time, so the average cost is much less.

As for redundancies, it was certainly a cause of great sadness that "Options for Change", the defence costs studies, and all the other measures flowing from those resulted in large numbers of people leaving the services—but I am afraid that that was inevitable. To ensure the correct profile of experience and the right balance of specialisation and age, it is necessary at all times to continue recruiting, to refresh the ranks at all levels.

Mr. Brazier: Is it not true that the armed forces are basically for the young, and that although we must deal generously with the older people who have had to be made redundant we must continue to recruit young people? Will my hon. Friend say a little more about the welcome initiatives that he is currently carrying out with the education and employment services?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his recognition that, especially for the infantry and the other

specialist arms of the services, this is essentially a young man's game. We need to ensure a constant flow of young people of the right age. I am grateful to him, too, for mentioning the jobcentre initiatives. Thanks to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, we shall tomorrow be announcing an initiative with the Employment Service to advertise jobs in 1,100 jobcentres nationwide. That follows a highly successful trial at 99 jobcentres. We are extremely confident that it will tap into an important source of young people and give them the information that they need when considering whether to join the armed forces. We very much hope that many more will do so as a result.

Dr. David Clark: Does the Minister believe that the recruitment budget has been well spent when the total strength of the Army is only 104,000 men and women against a requirement of 117,000—a shortfall of 13,000? It takes a Government of special genius, does it not, to be unable to recruit men and women to the Army when there are 2.5 million men and women desperate for work?

Mr. Soames: That shows a profound misunderstanding of the facts and is an obvious demonstration of the hon. Gentleman's complete lack of grasp of this important matter. We are competing in a highly competitive job market. It is true that we are suffering from manpower shortages—the Army is short of 2,500 men—but the hon. Gentleman's figures are way out.

I believe that our recruitment budget is extremely well and effectively spent. As I have said in the House before and will go on saying, we need to do better and to improve the image of the armed forces, so as to ensure a proper flow of young men and women into them. We badly need them; but the hon. Gentleman's assertions are way out of order.

Mr. Rathbone: What does the cost of recruiting to the Territorial Army happen to be? It has always struck me as the most cost-efficient part of the military.

Mr. Soames: I cannot tell my hon. Friend precisely, because the cost comes under the overall recruiting budget. My hon. Friend is certainly right to say that recruitment to the TA is extremely important. We regard it as an essential part of the one-army concept, and we regard the reserves as part of the mainstream forces. We greatly value their contribution to the United Kingdom defence effort.

Trident

5. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the deployment of Trident. [6342]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Trident system has been in operational service since December 1994. The phased replacement of Polaris by the Trident system is proceeding to schedule.

Mr. Bennett: Will the Minister confirm that when Victorious went on patrol it had only 12 missiles on board, compared with the 16 that Vanguard is carrying? Is that a change of policy? Does it mean that we are going to buy fewer missiles from the United States; and will each missile be carrying more warheads than the Polaris missiles carried, thereby putting us in breach of the non-proliferation treaty? Or will we conform to that treaty?

Mr. Arbuthnot: We shall certainly conform to the non-proliferation treaty. The hon. Gentleman was one of 42 Opposition Members who last October signed a motion calling for Trident to be scrapped. He comes from the wing of the Labour party that represents the real Labour party, and that means we cannot trust Labour on defence.

Mr. Robathan: Does my hon. Friend accept that the history of nuclear weapons makes many hon. Members uncomfortable—particularly the deployment of cruise missiles in the past decade, which was opposed by many hon. Members? The non-stop opposition to Trident by some Liberal and Labour Members suggests that they are more concerned with their own peculiar principles than with the good defence of our nation, which is supported by the majority of its people.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Yes. Nuclear deterrence has worked to prevent war in Europe for the past 50 years. We should remember that our nuclear deterrent has been a very good buy. Had Labour been in power in the past 16 years, we would not have any of those questions because we would not have a nuclear deterrent.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister confirm that his Department contacted Rosyth dockyard with a view to estimating the price of a contract to refit the Trident missile system? What does that tell us about the status of the Devonport contract? Does it not suggest that it was always unsoundly based and that the decision to send it there was purely political rather than economic?

Mr. Arbuthnot: No. My Department has not contacted Rosyth dockyard, which put in a unsolicited bid. The decision in 1993 to put nuclear refitting into Devonport was taken when we needed to have the issue settled. We do not intend to reopen the issue and move the contract to Rosyth.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that the results of the recent Russian election and the uncertainty that has been created underline the need for the west to maintain its nuclear shield? Do those election results not show that the meandering policies of the Leader of the Opposition on defence demonstrate that only one party can be guaranteed to defend the country?

Mr. Arbuthnot: Yes. The right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) used to be a member of the parliamentary Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Defence is just one of many issues on which he and the Labour party have said time and again, "We were wrong about that. Please forgive us." But the electorate will not forgive them.

Ms Rachel Squire: Does the Minister agree that the Government are entirely responsible for the two and a half years of delay and indecision over the refitting of Trident and the future ownership of the two dockyards? Will he tell the House today when he intends to make an announcement about the future ownership of those dockyards and provide firm guarantees on work load,

safety and conditions of employment at both Rosyth and Devonport?

Mr. Arbuthnot: It is not as a result of Government indecision that the matter has been delayed for so long. It is an exceptionally important and complicated matter to tie up all the issues involved in nuclear refitting. The hon. Lady has been assiduous and vigorous in fighting the corner for Rosyth, but nevertheless the Government have been absolutely right to pursue negotiations with the various companies involved. We have done so vigorously, and we intend to pursue those negotiations to a conclusion.

Trained Personnel

6. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the measures he has taken to enable the services to retain trained personnel. [6343]

Mr. Soames: The services have well-established measures in place to encourage the retention of trained personnel including incentive bonuses and excellent resettlement provisions. A career in the services today offers a rewarding and often exciting life with excellent opportunities rarely to be found in any other career.

Mr. Nicholson: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. He will be aware that there are widespread concerns, which have been expressed to me recently by service families of constituents, about the number of officers voluntarily leaving the three services. Particular concerns have been expressed about general list naval officers. Is he aware that the reassurances and initiatives announced earlier will be very welcome, but can he assure the House that those initiatives will not involve any lowering of standards in recruitment?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is right to raise the concern that is felt about what is clearly a problem. The services have been through a difficult and protracted period of change. The process has probably been more difficult than that faced by any other organisation within our society. We believe that the front line is now properly, correctly and robustly configured for the pursuit of our defence and security goals.

Big decisions have been taken. I hope that the men and women in the armed forces can now look forward to a period of stability. I confirm that we shall be seeking no lowering of any standards. On the contrary: we seek always to raise standards. We seek to be a model employer, employing very good people.

Mr. Hardy: Does the Minister agree that, as numbers fall and commitments are maintained or intensified, so the threat to the maintenance of good morale in the forces also intensifies, which is something that requires rather more urgent attention than the Government give it?

Mr. Soames: On the contrary: as the hon. Gentleman knows—he has considerable experience of these matters—with one or two isolated exceptions where bases or stations have been hit badly by redundancy programmes, morale in all three services is extremely high. I know that the hon. Gentleman undertakes many service visits. He will know that the armed forces are supremely confident of their mission and supremely capable of carrying it out.

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

7. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the Government's policy on the enlargement of NATO [6344]

Mr. Soames: The Government support the enlargement of NATO and are playing an important role in enhancing the stability and security of the whole of Europe.

Dr. Spink: Will my hon. Friend continue his policy of maintaining and building on NATO's strength and not jeopardise that strength by over-rapid development of NATO by following Labour's Eurocentric policies? Does my hon. Friend agree that the Labour party cannot be trusted to maintain a strong NATO and, indeed, cannot be trusted on defence?

Mr. Soames: I wholly agree with my hon. Friend on both issues. NATO is the most successful defensive alliance that the world has ever seen. My hon. Friend is right to confirm that it must and will remain for ever the cornerstone of our European defence. It is inconceivable that we could consider true security in Europe other than on the basis of a transatlantic alliance. I share my hon. Friend's real concerns and those of many ordinary people the length and breadth of the land about the United Kingdom's security should Labour ever come to power again.

Mr. Gapes: Is the Minister, when considering future security in the north Atlantic, alarmed at the developments in Guatemala, where the hand-picked candidate of the extreme right-wing former dictator is ahead in the elections? That man, Senor Alfonso Portillo, could become President. Is the Minister—

Madam Speaker: Order. That supplementary question is entirely out of order. It is the first day back and I shall bear in mind my reprimand to the hon. Member for the next two or three weeks. Let us have another question.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: Coming from Guatemala closer to home, and agreeing with my hon. Friend about the significant importance of NATO and the excellent support that the Government have given and continue to give to NATO through the "Partnership for Peace" proposals, when considering the enlargement of NATO, will he assure the House that, in addition to the "Partnership for Peace" proposals, he will give the most urgent consideration to including the Visegrad countries—the countries of central Europe—as full members of NATO?

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend has probably had a more honourable and distinguished career in respect of such efforts than anyone in this place. His contribution to NATO is great. He knows that the "Partnership for Peace" operation has been an outstanding success. He is right to warn that countries will not for ever tolerate being dragged along on the PFP programme. The how and why of the enlargement programme are almost settled. There is further work to be done, however, on retaining the effectiveness of NATO while the transition to enlargement takes place. Otherwise, I can definitely give the assurance that my hon. Friend seeks.

Mr. Spellar: The Minister is obviously aware that one of the key issues in NATO is the harmonisation of equipment. Can he give us a better reply than his

colleague and say how he reconciles that with considering field ambulances from non-NATO Austria over the world-class Land Rover? When will he put British industry first?

Mr. Soames: I know that the hon. Gentleman has a number of failings, but I did not know that deafness was one of them. My hon. Friend has said that no decision has yet been taken. The hon. Gentleman's question is therefore a total waste of time.

Nuclear Proliferation

8. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his current assessment of the threat posed by nuclear proliferation. [6345]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The threat posed by potential nuclear proliferation remains serious, and the Government continue to make strenuous efforts to prevent such proliferation.

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. Bearing in mind the continuing threat from nuclear proliferation, does he agree that it is important that we retain our independent nuclear deterrent, which is a credible defence for this nation and sends out a very clear message? Does he further agree that there would not be such a clear message should the Labour party come to power, with its proposals in its defence review, which would indeed just whittle away and, finally, ditch our own deterrent, which is the guarantee of our security?

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend is right. The Labour party would play hokey cokey with our nuclear deterrent. It does not believe in the nuclear deterrent when it says that it does. But sometimes it says that it does not, and still it does not.

Mr. Wareing: If the Government are so supportive of non-proliferation, does that include the south Pacific? How does the Government's policy of supporting French nuclear tests square with the policies that the Minister has outlined now? Will the Government declare a unilateral moratorium on British testing?

Mr. Arbuthnot: It may have escaped the hon. Gentleman's notice that the French Government already possess nuclear weapons, so it is not really a question of non-proliferation. The French Government were given advice that they should test their weapons to pursue safety, and we could not possibly question that. We have already declared that we will abide by the US moratorium, so there is no need for us to take the step that the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Married Quarters

9. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy concerning the sell-off of the married quarters housing stock. [6347]

Mr. Arbuthnot: We propose to take forward the transfer to the private sector of the married quarters estate in England and Wales.

Mrs. Prentice: Having already wasted £6 million of taxpayers' money on a previously ill thought out housing sell-off, will the Minister now give the House some assurance that further taxpayers' money will not be wasted in that way, or is he convinced that, with David Hart as the adviser in this sale, he will get it right this time?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I have considerable confidence that we are getting it right. We have made it clear, however, that the sale will go ahead only if both the price and the terms are right. There are tremendous benefits to be obtained. We want to improve the management and the quality of the married quarters housing estate. I hope that that is an objective that the hon. Lady shares.

Mr. Whittingdale: Does my hon. Friend accept that, in some cases, the quality of the married quarters housing stock, such as that at Colchester garrison, leaves something to be desired? Will he confirm that the sale of the housing stock will release resources that can be used to improve the properties, and may also make available surplus properties for use by the local community?

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend is quite right. The purpose of the sale is to achieve a number of benefits, including an investment in upgrading service homes, but also genuinely to transfer risk to the private sector, which is best placed to take that risk. It will help us to dispose of surplus properties more effectively and, as I said in answer to the previous supplementary question, it will improve the management and quality of service housing.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Does the Minister accept that the disposal of Ministry of Defence property, including service housing and other property, can raise considerable anxiety, as evidenced by the description by Lord Hill-Norton, Admiral of the Fleet, of the Minister's right hon. Friend as "a little creep"—a description that one certainly could not apply, for many reasons, to the hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames)? There are, of course, considerable apprehensions in the minds of many people about the future of Greenwich, about the future of the old Admiralty and of Admiralty arch itself. What assurances can the Minister give the House that those properties will be properly dealt with?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am a little disappointed in the hon. and learned Gentleman. Perhaps he was not here earlier when I answered a question about Admiralty arch. I have made it plain that the Government have no intention, and never had any intention, of disposing of Admiralty arch. The question of Greenwich has been raised and dealt with in the House on many occasions; it is clear that the facility needs to be used properly, to the nation's best advantage, and it will be so used.

Mr. Dykes: How many married quarters will be relinquished during the gradual phasing out of RAF Stanmore Park? Can my hon. Friend confirm the good news that the combination to form RAF Bentley Priory will eventually create more civilian jobs?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I can answer yes to the second question, on the advice of my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces. I am afraid that I cannot answer the first without notice, but I will write to my hon. Friend.

Bosnia

10. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the evacuation arrangements for British troops in the event of an emergency evacuation from Bosnia. [6348]

Mr. Soames: The NATO-led implementation force, of which the British troops form a significant and important part, is robustly configured and fully capable of ensuring its own defence and enforcing local compliance with the peace agreement, should that become necessary.

Mr. Jones: We are given to understand that the NATO troops are capable of responding vigorously to infringements of the Dayton agreement, but how can that be credible in relation to one of the combatants, Croatia? As our supply lines run through that country, will we not face a choice between turning a blind eye to any Croatian infringements and withdrawing our troops?

Mr. Soames: I am happy to be able to report that there have been very few infringements and firing incidents. Compliance is generally good. Indeed, most of the firing incidents that have taken place so far have been fuelled by an excess of new year cocktails, which in Bosnia can lead to recreational firing of a thoroughly dangerous type.

The general commanding UK 3 Division, General Jackson—to whom I spoke today—assures me that all the British soldiers are in excellent heart, and that they have a clear sense of purpose, a proper military mission and the equipment that they need to carry it out. They are doing a first-class job.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Does my hon. Friend agree that "evacuation" is not a word that should ever occur in the NATO manual?

Mr. Soames: As my hon. Friend knows, members of the Brigade of Guards do not retreat; they advance backwards. There is no question of evacuation. IFOR, the implementation force, is robustly and fully equipped to undertake its job, and it will do that job. It is encouraging that compliance has been very good so far: that is good news, and it means that the operation will be able to take place on the agreed time scale.

Mr. Murphy: Has the Minister seen today's reports that a soldier in the Royal Welch Fusiliers, when captured by the Bosnian Serbs some time ago, was subjected to torture? Is there any truth in that report, and what does the Minister intend to do about it?

Mr. Soames: I had only just heard of the report when I came into the Chamber. I have no reason to believe that it is true. I should add that that regiment acquitted itself with great distinction and considerable courage in very difficult circumstances, and I cannot believe that what is reported happened.

Mr. Atkins: Were not British troops chosen to perform the tasks that they are performing in Bosnia because they have some of the best equipment in the world, and are the best-trained troops in the world? Have not their presence and their activities so far justified the world's judgment in wanting them to be there?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing the House's attention to the remarkable achievements of British troops in Bosnia, where they have worked logistical and peacekeeping miracles in the mud and snow and in a very difficult theatre of war. They have done a marvellous job; they are a huge credit to everyone in the country, and we should all share a great sense of pride in what they have done.

Food Procurement

11. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will issue guidelines covering the procedure for food procurement in the armed forces. [6349]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Procurement and supply of food to the armed forces is undertaken by NAAFI against a three-year contract which began on 1 October 1994. Food is required to meet specifications or standards agreed between the MOD and NAAFI and to provide value for money.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The Minister may be aware that I have been organising a national boycott of Campbell Soups products because of the disgraceful way in which that company treated my constituents when it announced the closure of an extremely profitable factory in Maryport. May we have an assurance that Ministers will say to NAAFI, "Boycott Campbell Soups products and, in particular, Fray Bentos products"? Will the Minister also advise the Minister of State for the Armed Forces to follow suit?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I suspect that a bowl of soup is just what I need at the moment. I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman's vigour in pursuing his campaigns. The NAAFI does not buy soup from Campbell Soups, because it buys on the basis of price and does not buy condensed soup. An interesting statistic that the hon. Gentleman will wish to know is that the Army spends £125,000 a year on soup.

Mr. Wilkinson: Although Napoleon Bonaparte rightly understood that an army marches on its stomach, is not the problem with the British Army today that it gets rather more food than it needs, as is shown by the performance in objective procedures such as the P Company selection test and the basic fitness test?

Mr. Arbuthnot: No.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Will the Minister confirm that the guidelines covering procedure for the procurement of military ambulances ensures that the cheapest unit that meets the specifications is the one that is purchased?

Mr. Arbuthnot: The hon. Lady is again to be congratulated on her ingenuity. I know of no guidelines on the procedures covering military ambulances in terms such as she suggests.

RAF Manston

12. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the annual running and maintenance costs for his Department's Fire Service and Central Training Establishment at RAF Manston. [6351]

Mr. Soames: The costs of the Ministry of Defence Fire Service and Central Training Establishment cannot be easily separated from the overall cost of running RAF Manston. The current review of MOD fire service training should, however, identify these costs in due course.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I thank my hon. Friend for informing the House that there will be a review the costs

of fire training provision by the MOD. May I urge him to make that a wide-ranging review to include all Home Office facilities and the National Fire College at Moreton-in-Marsh so that we can ensure that MOD fire service training provision is truly cost-effective?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing this matter to my attention and for the correspondence that he has had with my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State about the excellent fire service college at Moreton-in-Marsh. As he knows, the review is considering all options for professional fire training, including the Civil Airports Authority's fire school, local authority fire brigades and the fire service school in his constituency. I assure my hon. Friend that any proposal will be carefully considered, and I shall be happy to see my hon. Friend if he wishes to lobby on its behalf.

Recruitment

13. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next expects to meet his American counterpart to discuss the recruitment of military personnel. [6352]

Mr. Soames: In his regular meetings with his American counterpart, my right hon. Friend discusses the range of relevant military issues.

Sir Michael Neubert: Will my hon. Friend take account of American experience on the issue of homosexuality and military personnel and do nothing that would damage the morale and fighting efficiency of our highly motivated and exclusively professional armed forces? Will he assure the House that Ministers will stand firm however heavy the fire from the ranks of the politically correct?

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend raises an extremely important point. He knows that it remains the Government's view that homosexuality is incompatible with the special conditions of service life. The policy is not the result of a moral judgment, but a practical result of homosexuality's effect on military life and morale factors, as my hon. Friend rightly says. I am happy to give him the reassurance that he seeks.

Mr. Tony Banks: When he discusses recruitment of military personnel with his American counterparts, does the Secretary of State for Defence discuss the way in which defence chiefs and ex-defence chiefs have treated political defence leaders? Would it be acceptable, for example, for someone who is or has been in the United States military to describe the Secretary of State as "a little creep"?

Mr. Soames: It would be as discourteous there as it was here.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 9 January. [6368]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Flynn: What democratic legitimacy has a Prime Minister who lost the last vote in the House, who has lost every by-election by a mile, and who is now being abandoned by some of his most honourable Members, including the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Miss Nicholson), who is warmly welcomed to the Opposition Benches today? How can a party at war with itself provide good government? Is it not degrading of the Prime Minister to deny the country an election and the choice between an exhausted Tory Government and an invigorated young Labour party? They cannot command the confidence of the people. The powerful cry from this country's people to the Government is to go—

Madam Speaker: Order. There are others who want to ask the Prime Minister questions.

The Prime Minister: The legitimacy might have something to do with the largest popular vote ever recorded at the last general election and a majority in the House.

Mr. Brooke: In his busy life, did my right hon. Friend have the opportunity yesterday to read in *The Times*, in the series on aging, a self-analysis by a middle-class married woman, in which she identified seven what she called

"irritating little signs of the spiral towards death",

and did he note that she placed at their heart having voted for the Liberal Democrats at the last general election?

The Prime Minister: As a matter of fact, I am afraid that I did not see that article, and I am extremely sorry that I missed it.

Mr. Blair: Can the Prime Minister tell us what on earth possessed him to resurrect the idea of Post Office privatisation on Sunday? Is it not exactly because of policies such as that that his party is in disarray, that his Members of Parliament are defecting and that the country wants a change of Government?

The Prime Minister: I think that the right hon. Gentleman has just had an extremely interesting trip to Japan. While he was there, he might have been better occupied if he had travelled on the privatised Japanese railway—a policy which he and his colleagues also oppose for this country. What the right hon. Gentleman, despite his rhetoric, does not in his heart understand is that the private sector is more efficient than the public sector—*[Interruption.]* I am delighted to see the opposition to private ownership coming from Opposition Members. Private ownership enables people to have, if I may use the phrase, a stake in this country.

Mr. Blair: He can tell that to consumers of water and electricity. Is it not obvious that the only reason that Post Office privatisation is back on the agenda is to placate that faction of the Conservative party that wants to privatise anything and everything? Is it not precisely because the whole business of his Government is now about pleasing one faction or another of the Conservative party that the country has given up on the Conservatives as a serious party of government?

The Prime Minister: For the right hon. Gentleman, who tries to tell the world that he is a moderniser who

has brought his party into the 1990s, to oppose—as he does lock, stock and barrel—private ownership of industry in this country, when prices are falling and services are improving, shows the extent to which the glossy words he uses are not matched by what he really believes in.

Mr. Blair: If he is so keen and confident about privatising the Post Office, the Prime Minister should put it in his manifesto and call a general election to decide the matter.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman will have observed over the years that we have included in our manifesto many policies to which he and his party have objected, and we have won elections on those policies. He should say whether he will re-nationalise those industries that are now in the private sector. What is the answer to that? He does not know and he cannot say, because, if he says yes, he upsets one half of his party and if he says no, he upsets the other half.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Assuming that my right hon. Friend has an extensive knowledge of the Bible, including the Old Testament and Genesis, will he ensure that the policies that he introduces do not enable the Cains of this generation to flourish any more than they did in biblical times?

The Prime Minister: I assure my hon. Friend that this party will remain the same centre-right broad church in the future as it has been throughout its history.

Mr. Beith: Is it not clear that the Prime Minister cannot stop his colleagues from squabbling however many warnings he gives them on television? Indeed, the Secretary of State for Defence now indulges in long-distance, intercontinental squabbling. As long as the Prime Minister has to face those elements in his party, he cannot address the concerns shared by thousands of people who voted for him last time, which were so clearly expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and West Devon (Miss Nicholson). Might he not now admit that the party is over for him?

The Prime Minister: I believe that the hon. Lady has made a decision that she will, in due course, come to regret, for reasons that I have set out in the past. She has made her decision and will have to live with it, both in the short term and in the long term.

Matters of concern for people in this country are mortgage rates, which are the lowest for 30 years; the basic rate of tax, which is the lowest for 50 years; unemployment, which is falling more rapidly here than anywhere else in Europe; and inflation, which is lower than it has been for 50 years. Those are matters about which the right hon. Gentleman used to attack the Conservative party some years ago; they are now being solved more successfully than they have been at any stage in the past. The right hon. Gentleman has no response to the economic prospects that now lie ahead of us.

Mr. Garel-Jones: During his discussions this morning with the leader of the Spanish Opposition, did my right hon. Friend have the opportunity to ask him why, after more than 10 years of socialism in Spain, that country still has the highest unemployment figures of western Europe?

The Prime Minister: There is, of course, a close relationship across Europe between socialist Governments who have been in power for a long time, the level of social costs that they apply, the adoption of the social chapter and the unemployment levels in those countries. That is why we are so determined not to adopt those policies, but to ensure that our economic policies create jobs and do not destroy them for dogmatic reasons.

Lockerbie

Q2. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Prime Minister if, when he last met President Clinton, they discussed the advisability of continuing with the pursuit of those persons alleged to have committed the murders at Lockerbie in December 1988. [6369]

The Prime Minister: On 29 November, I discussed Lockerbie and Libya briefly with President Clinton. Both Britain and the United States remain committed to bringing to justice those responsible for the Lockerbie bombing. The evidence supports the charges against the two accused.

Dr. Godman: Why does the Prime Minister place so much emphasis on the need to try such persons in either Scotland or America? Why America? Why does he not tell President Clinton that it makes much better sense to try those individuals at the High Court in Edinburgh or, failing that, at an international tribunal at The Hague? Surely he cannot expect the Libyan authorities to allow those individuals to subject themselves to a television show trial in Washington.

The Prime Minister: We are not asking them to. We think that the trial should take place in Scotland. We certainly do not think that it would be desirable—necessarily—for it to take place at The Hague. If, as they have occasionally intimated, the Libyans accept Scottish law and a Scottish judge, I know of no good reason whatsoever why the accused should not appear before a court in Scotland. That is where the crime was committed—above Scotland—and that is where I believe the accused should most properly stand trial. I hope that that will occur and I hope that the accused will be surrendered by the Libyan Government so that justice can be seen to be done.

Sir Teddy Taylor: As we have an absolute obligation to the relatives of those who died in that appalling massacre, and as the people of Libya are suffering terribly from the policy of sanctions, what is the argument against passing a simple law in this House that would enable the two accused persons to be tried at The Hague in exactly the same way as other foreign alleged criminals—from Serbia, for example—are being tried? Should we not try to resolve the problem quickly in the interests of those who lost relatives in that appalling carnage?

The Prime Minister: I, too, have seen some of the suggestions that the accused should be surrendered for trial in one place or another, but there is no guarantee whatever that the accused would be made available for trial if we went to the trouble of setting up a trial in a third country—at, for example, The Hague.

On a wider but relevant point, I do not think that we ought to allow suspected terrorists to dictate where and how they should be tried. That would imply an acceptance of the accused's assertion that they would not receive a fair trial in Scotland. That is not an assertion that I believe the House should accept.

Engagements

Q3. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 9 January. [6370]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Campbell: Since the Prime Minister's majority is getting smaller and smaller, will he stop the privatisation of the railways, which is costing taxpayers £1 billion, stop the back-door privatisation of the health service, and certainly not go ahead with the privatisation of the Post Office? Will he resign now, call a general election and take his little creeps with him?

The Prime Minister: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is of course no. I am rather surprised to hear that question from him. Unless I misremember, it was the hon. Gentleman who, not very long ago, said that the Labour leadership

"got it into their heads that Labour is unelectable unless it goes down this social democratic road. That is rubbish".

The right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) would claim that that is exactly the road that they are going down. On that basis, and considering what the hon. Gentleman just said, he ought not to want an election.

Q4. **Mr. Alexander:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 9 January. [6371]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Alexander: In view of the healthy economic statistics that my right hon. Friend gave the House a moment ago, especially the fact that inflation is now at its lowest level for 50 years, is it not abundantly clear to all independent observers that Britain is a success story? Will he confirm to the House and the country that he has no intention of putting all that at risk by coming forward with the sort of half-baked ideas that we had from the midday sun in Singapore recently?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely correct about the success that the country now has, which is recognised in almost every country in the world with, perhaps, the solitary exception of this one. I think it is becoming increasingly apparent that we have success. We have provided the basis to turn our country into the most enterprising country in Europe. We are now in a position to return to a tax-cutting agenda and to give people more choice, more opportunity and genuine ownership—a genuine stake in this society. That is the way in which we believe it is right to proceed, and will proceed.

Q5. **Mrs. Jane Kennedy:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 9 January. [6372]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Kennedy: Does the Prime Minister agree with the Secretary of State for Defence that there is no place in the modern Conservative party for those who believe in closer ties with Europe?

The Prime Minister: Sadly for the hon. Lady, that is not what my right hon. Friend said.

Mr. Hargreaves: In view of the number of questions asked by hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber during recent Defence questions, will my right hon. Friend take time to speak with the Secretary of State for Defence on the subject of the forthcoming order of ambulances for the Army?

The Prime Minister: Nothing has yet been decided on the subject of the order of ambulances for the Army. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, who answered questions this afternoon, will report the views of the House to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Holloway Prison

3.30 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn) *(by private notice)* asked the Secretary of State for Home Department if he will make a statement on the policy pursued by the authorities in Holloway prison in manacling pregnant prisoners in labour.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Miss Ann Widdecombe): I am grateful to have the opportunity to clarify both Prison Service policy in general and the practice in Holloway. It is our policy to secure all prisoners under escort for whatever reason, but where medical treatment is concerned we remove restraints for both male and female prisoners as and when requested by medical staff. However, it is the policy of the Prison Service not to keep women handcuffed while in labour and childbirth. It has never been Prison Service policy to keep women handcuffed during labour and childbirth. Although I am explaining this now for the benefit of hon. Members, the policy was also explained by the Director General of the Prison Service on a number of occasions over the weekend. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. We must have order in the House. The Minister is making an important statement. Those who are not interested are perfectly free to leave, but the rest of us would like to hear what she has to say.

Miss Widdecombe: The practice at Holloway prison is to follow the national policy to which I have just referred. The case that has probably prompted the hon. Gentleman's concerns stems from Channel 4's use of secret cameras outside the labour ward at Whittington hospital. I must say that their use on this occasion meant that the full story was not told.

The cameras filmed the prisoner every time she left the maternity ward and entered the public areas either to use the lavatory or to smoke a cigarette. During that time, which was prior to the confirmation of labour, she was secured. While she was in the labour ward, she was not handcuffed or manacled, even before labour was confirmed. Once labour was established, the prisoner was allowed out of the ward unsecured, as has been confirmed by hospital staff.

There are standing arrangements agreed between Whittington hospital and Holloway prison to deal with prisoners who attend for medical treatment. No concerns have been registered by the hospital about Holloway practice. Hospitals are not secure places in which to keep prisoners. Since 1990, 20 women have escaped from hospitals. Of all the escapes by women from escort since 1990, 28.5 per cent. have been from hospitals. In absolute terms, that is 20 escapes out of a total of 70 escapes from escort. The Prison Service is obliged to take precautions, and it would rightly be criticised if it did not.

Some hon. Members may like to think that a pregnant woman would not or could not escape, but unfortunately that is not true. In a recent case, a prisoner who was four and a half months pregnant jumped from a first-floor window during—

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Labour happens after nine months.

Madam Speaker: Order. The Minister is making a statement. If the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) has a question, I shall try to call him at the appropriate time. Until then, he must listen to the statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I can understand why the hon. Gentleman does not want to listen—he does not want to know the truth. The lady to whom I was referring jumped from a first floor window during an antenatal appointment. In another incident, a woman prisoner who was in hospital to give birth was allowed privacy with a visitor and obtained drugs. In a further incident, a male prisoner who was diagnosed as completely paralysed jumped up and ran away as soon as his bed watch was withdrawn.

The Prison Service has a duty of care to the mother, but that must be balanced against the needs of the service to keep all prisoners—including pregnant women prisoners—in secure custody. I am satisfied that the policy is right and is consistent with the views of the House.

Mr. Straw: Is the Minister aware that the statement that she has just made is completely unacceptable, and that in a civilised society it is inhuman, degrading and unnecessary for a prisoner to be shackled at any stage of labour? Will the Minister confirm—as she finally had to admit on television last Friday—that no woman prisoner in labour has ever escaped? Does she appreciate that labour may go on for many hours, during which many women find it necessary to walk around?

With regard to the case of the prisoner shown on Channel 4 last Friday, does the Minister accept that the woman was in labour when she was in hospital? How is the fact that the woman was manacled on a number of occasions while going to the lavatory and into the corridors consistent with the categorical undertaking given to my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) by Mr. Richard Tilt—the acting Director General of the Prison Service—that

"cuffs have . . . to be removed from women in labour"?

Was not the action taken to manacle this prisoner in the clearest breach of that undertaking?

The Minister stated that there had been no complaints from Whittington hospital. Is she aware—as I am, following conversations this morning with the chairman of the Whittington hospital trust—that that hospital is profoundly concerned about the practice of manacling prisoners who are in labour and, indeed, prisoners who are pregnant? Why has the Prison Service been so dilatory in responding to the offer made by the Whittington to take its community midwifery service into Holloway prison itself, thus ending the need for pregnant prisoners to travel to hospital except once labour has been established?

Is the Minister aware that staff at all levels in the Prison Service now feel so intimidated by the climate created by Ministers that they are being forced to make decisions that defy both common sense and common decency? Does not the Minister understand that that climate of intimidation led to the grotesque situation shown on Channel 4 last Friday, when the security measures taken were wholly disproportionate to the risk? Was not the president of the Royal College of Midwives entirely right when she said that the distress of handcuffing a woman in labour inevitably puts the health of the mother and the baby at risk, and is barbaric and a fundamental violation of a woman's dignity?

Miss Widdecombe: All the hon. Gentleman's questions were answered by my statement, but I shall spell out my reply so that even he will understand. The lady was not in labour when she was secured.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Does my hon. Friend realise that my constituents expect criminals who are sent to gaol to stay there and that we expect everything to be done to ensure that escapes do not happen or that there are fewer and fewer of them? What progress is being made to reduce the number of escapes from Her Majesty's prisons?

Miss Widdecombe: Considerable progress has already been made, as my hon. Friend will be aware. Since the Prison Service became an agency in 1993, escapes have been cut by 77 per cent. There was, however, still a disproportionately high level, in percentage terms, of escapes among female prisoners vis-à-vis male prisoners. When we looked into that, we found that the only difference was that, whereas restraints were routinely used on male prisoners under escort, they were not used on female prisoners. We therefore changed our policy in April, with the result that escapes among female prisoners have dramatically fallen. I hope that that satisfies my hon. Friend as to the progress that we are making.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Why does not the Minister show some understanding of the anger and revulsion felt by many responsible people as a result of the revelations? Can she confirm that the use of chains in these circumstances has increased, that it has increased as a direct result of Ministers' insistence on certain security measures and that there are alternatives, such as the creation of greater security in the places used and having more staff attending escort duties?

Miss Widdecombe: I can only state again that we remove restraints when treatment has commenced or, in the case of pregnant women, when labour is confirmed. We regard that as striking the right balance between the need to maintain security and the need to recognise the mother's situation. The film on Channel 4 showed clearly the lady concerned moving freely around the side ward, even after childbirth, when she was unsecured and looking after her baby. She was secured only when she entered the public areas of the hospital when she was not in labour.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Although the issue of handcuffing prisoners is undoubtedly controversial, does my hon. Friend agree that it somewhat masks the real progress that has been made in prison conditions? The vast majority of inmates now live on their own in cells with internal sanitation.

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. Friend is right. Now, 96 per cent. of prisoners have access to sanitation 24 hours a day. We have completely eliminated trebling in cells, we have reduced the number of prisoners sharing two to cells designed for one and we have completely eliminated the use of police cells. That is a major achievement by the Prison Service, and I am sorry that Opposition Members will not join in praising the management and staff concerned.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Despite the fact that the Minister seems to show a frightening inability to understand the difference between a woman who is four and a half months pregnant and a woman who is in labour, would she like to tell us how many cases there are of women prisoners being taken to an outside hospital without being in labour? Starting contractions does not inhibit the ability to walk around. If the Minister cannot get accurate information, would she like to astonish the House by saying that she is sorry?

Miss Widdecombe: For accurate information, we rely on the experts, who are the medical staff. There is a clear procedure for establishing when a woman is in labour. That is established not by the prison staff, but by the medical staff. A form is filled in, which establishes that fact—*[Interruption.]* Yes. That means that we have a written record, much to the discomfort of Opposition Members, of when labour started in this case. There is a clear procedure and a clear record is kept. With the exception of one incident for which we apologised fully at the time—the case of Ms Edwards—there has been no record of any woman being secured while in labour, according to medical staff and medical definition.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): Will my hon. Friend confirm that, in October last year, an additional £326,000 was allocated to Holloway, which enabled the prison to employ an additional 25 members of staff? Can she give the House an assurance that when a female prisoner attends for medical care, especially for maternity care, she will be escorted by female prison warders?

Miss Widdecombe: I share the concerns that have been expressed about decency and delicacy and the use of male officers in these circumstances, and about females being secured to male officers while undergoing intimate treatment. I understand that. The Prison Service has also taken those concerns on board. We hope to be able to move to a position in which, as far as possible, women in this situation are attended by female prison officers.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): If the Minister listens to expert medical opinion, why has she ignored what the Royal College of Midwives has said: that the sort of treatment that we saw on our television screens, and about which we have heard in the past, being given to women prisoners while giving birth is totally unacceptable? It can cause grave trauma in the mother and there is sufficient evidence to give concern that it can traumatise the baby. Surely it is time that a direct order was given that no such barbaric practice will ever occur again.

Miss Widdecombe: We have made it clear that women in labour will not be secured and that it has never been our policy for them to be so secured. The opinion of the medical staff who were involved in the actual incident in the hospital is that our policy was not violated. I can quite believe that anybody merely watching the film and the discussions surrounding it may well have come to a different view, but on the facts as presented, and as logged by Holloway staff and by hospital staff, there was no violation of our policy, there was no barbaric treatment and the usual procedures were fully carried out.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Is the Minister aware that there are a number of prison officers in my constituency who work at Whitemoor, Wayland and Norwich? They completely refute any suggestion that there is a climate of intimidation. They have never heard anything quite so ridiculous, because they support the strong leadership given by the Government.

Miss Widdecombe: I can indeed confirm that. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making it clear that those

[Miss Widdecombe]

who work at the sharp end in the Prison Service, and who do such magnificent work, have confidence in the Government's policies.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: As someone who has joined the Minister on many occasions in the life lobby, where she has taken a position of principle, I find it quite astonishing that she could spend the last week going on television, and come to the House today, to defend this practice. This is the practice of the last century. The great body of British public opinion believes that it is wrong that pregnant women should be manacled in prison. I call on the Minister once again to think of her principles of the past and to stand up and demand a review of this utterly inhumane policy.

Miss Widdecombe: I can see no connection between the principles connected with the campaign to which the hon. Gentleman referred, from which I have never resiled, as well he knows, and the issue before us at the moment. Concern is taken for the mother and therefore also for her baby in all the medical attention that we manage to secure. If a woman is taken to hospital before she is in labour, that is because we have taken seriously any possibility that that situation may have been arrived at. I do not think that it would be anything other than harsh to have women delivered in prison, which could well be the result of midwives going into prison, rather than patients going into hospital. If the hon. Gentleman reflects on it, he will find that what I have said is a civilised and secure policy.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Will my hon. Friend confirm that this woman was in prison for theft, and that, unless she were pregnant at the time that she committed the offence, the chances are that it was not a first offence, and that it is essential that even women who are pregnant must be treated from the point of view of punishment, as everybody else in our society is? Is she aware that the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) has on a previous occasion sought to exploit an aspect of the Prison Service and had to be bailed out by his own leader because he got into such a state? Is not the Labour party doing exactly the same as it did on that occasion: trying to exploit some aspect of prison arrangements for its own political advantage?

Miss Widdecombe: It is very clear to me that the Opposition pay scant regard to facts and rather more regard to political advantage. The hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) met me to discuss the policy, and we had an entirely sensible discussion about it. He did not express shock, horror and outrage about the policy that has been implemented throughout.

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): Will the Minister ask the Royal College of Midwives to conduct a private seminar for her about some of the basic facts of childbirth? She will learn that there is no single second when someone can say that a woman has gone into labour. The possession of forms to be filled in does not alter the biological facts. The onset of contractions usually leads to the development of labour, and it is a scientific fact that, if trauma is interposed, labour can be arrested—which is not a very good idea for anyone concerned.

Will the Minister tell us exactly when the form was filled in and how much later that occurred? Does she think it likely that a woman who was about to go into labour would run away, and where would she run to?

Miss Widdecombe: With regard to telling the hon. Lady the exact moment at which labour commenced, that is a matter for medical advice. That is why we always take medical advice and that is why we act upon it as soon as it is received and remove restraints.

The Director General of the Prison Service will shortly meet the president of the Royal College of Midwives to have what I hope will be a slightly more constructive discussion than we have had today. They will discuss respective concerns and examine what can be done to reassure the public, who may have been deceived by the wild and rash claims of the Labour party. I say once again: no woman in labour, as defined on medical advice, is secured.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Does the Minister accept that any woman who has had a child will find her statements utterly repellent? They will find the grins on the faces of Tory Members of Parliament even more repellent.

Will the Minister allow me to spell it out? Whatever forms she may have seen, once a woman's waters have broken, her cervix is dilated and she is sitting or standing awaiting the onset of labour contractions, she will not be running anywhere. There is a world of difference between being four and a half, six or even seven months pregnant and the final hours of pregnancy. Does the Minister accept that it is degrading and inappropriate for women to be shackled to men in the final hours of pregnancy?

Miss Widdecombe: On the last point, I have said already that I fully share the concern expressed about male officers being involved at that stage and, if possible, we shall move to a position where female officers are used on such occasions. I share the hon. Lady's concerns in that regard, and I do not seek to diminish them in any way.

The hon. Lady gave a graphic description of the onset of labour, but I am sure that she does not need to tell the medical profession about it. Medical professionals know all the facts, and we take their advice.

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): Will the Minister confirm that the board of visitors at Holloway prison warned her that the practice was continuing? Why did she choose to do nothing about it then?

Miss Widdecombe: Because our policy has been fully implemented.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): I visited Holloway early in December, and if I were not concerned about the practice, I would not have sought a meeting with the Minister. The Minister said that I put my arguments in a very reasonable way. Therefore, does she accept that I sought a meeting with her because I was concerned about the practice? If she did not believe that we were protesting about the manacling of women during pregnancy, why—on the very day that I visited her at the Home Office—did the acting Director General of the Prison Service, Mr. Richard Tilt, issue a letter on the subject? In that letter, he said:

"Cuffs are also to be removed from women who are in labour".

In other words, he reiterated the policy that was supposed to operate. However, the events took place after those assurances were given to me and after that letter was sent

out by Mr. Tilt. Is it not the case that the Minister simply did not do anything when she knew full well what was going on?

Miss Widdecombe: I am happy to confirm that, when the hon. Gentleman came to see me, he put his points very reasonably. He was seeking clarification of the policy. We had decided, because there had been so much discussion and misinformation, to reiterate the exact terms of the policy. They were not fresh instructions; they were a reiteration of existing instructions.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. We shall now move on.

Points of Order

3.56 pm

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. As you will know, there has been exceptionally severe weather over the past few weeks in Scotland. In the Grampian region, for example, many schools opened only today, and some are still closed. Local authorities have incurred phenomenal extra costs that are way beyond anything for which they could reasonably have been expected to budget—at a time when they have been told that budgets will be cut even further. Surely the Government must make a statement on how those extra costs are to be met.

Have you had any requests from the Government to make such a statement? If they had any care for the people still unfortunately under their rule, it seems logical that they would make a statement about what is to happen.

Madam Speaker: I have not been informed today that the Government are seeking to make a statement on the issue that the hon. Gentleman raised.

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Have you had any notice of ministerial intention to make a statement on what has become notorious as the Vickers memorandum? In that memorandum—written by a captain of industry and knight of the realm, Sir Colin Chandler, following discussions with Dick Evans, the chief executive of British Aerospace—a conspiracy is unveiled, involving the possible kidnap or murder of a political refugee, Professor Muhammad al-Masari, who was living peacefully in London. Is there any indication that the Government will explain the extraordinary events and their relationship to the decision to deport Mr. al-Masari?

Madam Speaker: I repeat what I said earlier. I am always informed before midday if the Government are seeking to make a statement. I suggest to the hon. Gentleman and to any others who wish to change the business of the House that they should approach the Leader of the House on Thursday during business questions to see whether there is any opportunity for a statement or debate.

Mr. David Marshall (Glasgow, Shettleston): Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes), Madam Speaker. As you are the protector of the rights of Back Benchers, I am sure that you are as concerned as I am that approximately 30,000 houses in Glasgow have suffered flood damage as a result of burst pipes, due to the exceptionally severe weather. More than 1,000 families are now homeless. However, the Scottish Minister responsible for industry and local government either complains that it is his day off or blames everything on school janitors. Can you advise me what one has to do to obtain a statement from the Secretary of State for Scotland on the problem, which is so important to the whole of Scotland?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman might reflect—he has been here for a number of years—that there are now greater opportunities for hon. Members to raise such issues in Adjournment debates. Perhaps I might direct his attention to the fact that, when matters are raised in Adjournment debates, the Minister has to make some response.

House of Commons (Reform)

3.58 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to establish a United Kingdom Convention for Parliamentary Reform; to require it to take evidence and to make proposals; and for connected purposes.

I am delighted to have this opportunity to ask leave of the House to introduce a Bill to establish a United Kingdom convention for parliamentary reform. I say that in spite of the fact that, as I shall describe in a moment, the process of winning the right to put the Bill before the House was in itself an excellent example of the reasons why the Bill is so necessary.

The purpose of the Bill will be to allow reform of our parliamentary system and procedures to be discussed objectively and in a non-party political manner, drawing on the wisdom of experts who are currently engaged in politics, and of those who are not. In that way, my Bill will allow proposals to be made and debated not on the basis of how much benefit they would bring to one political party or another but solely on the basis of their benefit to the citizens of our country, on whose behalf our present parliamentary set-up works so poorly.

My proposals are based on the highly successful work done by the Scottish convention. Although two of the four main parties in Scottish politics declined the opportunity to participate in the convention, the broad measure of agreement achieved over a wide range of political issues by the two parties that did participate was highly significant. It clearly showed that people of good will, when they are forced to put mere party self-interest on one side for a while, can produce a result that meets far better the needs of the electorate than the current political dog-fight ever can.

So why can we safely say that the present parliamentary set-up needs reform? For a start, there has been for some time widespread agreement on the need for change. Within the past few years, we have had the Jopling proposals and more recently the Nolan committee. But neither of them has come anywhere near satisfying the general public. As politicians, we are now just about the most despised of all the professions; only those who inhabit the Press Gallery—in the nether regions above your head, Madam Speaker—are more widely despised by the public than we are. How demeaning that we should be considered only marginally better than journalists. I say that as one whose father was a journalist—which at least proves that I am upwardly mobile.

If we are to gain more respect not just for ourselves—that is comparatively unimportant—but for the processes of government, so that our society can work better, and above all with a more widespread acceptance that our laws are sensible and worthy of being obeyed—with all that that means for the sense of well-being and common purpose in society—we should surely start by demonstrating that we can accept and understand the need for the reform of our own institution.

It was, I believe, Sir Cyril Smith who once memorably called this place the longest-running farce in Whitehall. Let us look at one or two examples of what he meant. In order to be sure of obtaining the chance to bring my proposals before the House today, I had to spend about 15 hours cooped up in a small room off an upstairs corridor somewhere that seemed, judging by the noise throughout the night, to be strategically placed just below Big Ben. There, my four hon. Friends who will be presenting the next four ten-minute Bills to the House joined me as we tried to snatch what sleep we could in a scene all too reminiscent of the doorway of some major London store on the night before the start of the January sales.

No doubt, next time, someone else will be so determined to ensure his place in the queue that he will feel compelled to wait not just for the 15 hours that we endured but for even longer. What an absurd way for Members of Parliament to decide who shall have the opportunity to put legislation before the House. Here we all are, paid more than twice the average wage, yet to do our job we have to indulge in this strange pantomime.

To take another example: every time we come to vote, it can take 20 minutes or more from the moment the vote is called to the moment a result is announced. I shall never forget the occasion, soon after I arrived in the House, when we started voting on a series of amendments to an education Bill at about 9 o'clock in the evening; apart from a short debate in the middle, lasting about 20 minutes, we then did nothing but vote until 1 o'clock in the early hours of the following morning. It is absurd that Members of this House should spend their time going through the Division Lobbies time and again, spending 20 minutes on each Division, three or four times an hour, for four hours on the trot. If we were setting up a new Parliament today, can anyone believe that we would not introduce some form of electronic voting system? [HON. MEMBERS: "No, we would not."] Of course we would.

It is not just the procedures that we use which are desperately in need of modernising if we are not to appear as a ridiculous anachronism to the average voter. If we were setting up a new Parliament today, can anyone imagine that we could do so in a debating Chamber that is large enough to hold only about two thirds of all the Members of Parliament? Of course we would not.

Nor would we dream of building a Chamber in which the main participants face one another a few feet apart, resembling gladiators in a Roman arena. The absurdity of that arrangement becomes clear when we remember that it arose from the simple fact that the Commons first sat in St. Stephen's chapel, where Government and Opposition occupied respective choirstalls. How often since the broadcasting of Parliament began—and particularly since it was televised—must the audience of Prime Minister's Question Time have wished that those occupying the Front Benches behaved less with the ferocity of gladiators and more with the decorum of choirboys?

Does anyone in the House believe that we can win the respect of the electorate as long as we maintain a system of questioning Ministers under which they are thought to have performed well only when they have been successful in hiding any glimmer of what might be called useful information?

As I have pointed out, we are the object of ridicule to many people. Is that any surprise, when we insist on maintaining practices and procedures that waste huge amounts of time and energy for no good reason other than that is the way in which it has always been done in the past?

Let us use the opportunity that the Bill can provide to see ourselves for once as others see us. The longer we hide from ourselves the extent to which the public despise us, the harder it will be to win back their respect. We need to clean up the mess of our politics, and where better to start than the way in which we run our own affairs?

My Bill will give Parliament the chance to hear proposals made by an objective, non-party political body as to how we can reform ourselves, so that we can once more win the respect of the electorate.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. David Rendel, Miss Emma Nicholson, Mr. A. J. Beith, Mr. Archy Kirkwood, Mr. Menzies Campbell, Mrs. Diana Maddock, Mr. Matthew Taylor, Ms Liz Lynne, Mr. Paul Tyler, Mr. Don Foster, Mr. Robert Maclennan and Mrs. Ray Michie.

HOUSE OF COMMONS (REFORM)

Mr. David Rendel accordingly presented a Bill to establish a United Kingdom Convention for Parliamentary Reform; to require it to take evidence and to make proposals; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 9 February and to be printed. [Bill 39.]

Orders of the Day

Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

4.7 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Sir Patrick Mayhew): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The purpose of the Bill is to make special provision in Northern Ireland for the maintenance of order and the rule of law. It will do so by re-enacting, with omissions and amendments, the current Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991. The Bill is made necessary by the continuing character and level of cruel and criminal terrorist activity in Northern Ireland, and by the fact that the current Act expires in August.

I described the scope of this terrorist activity when the House last discussed the current Act on 12 June last year. That scope has not diminished; rather, it has increased. To the catalogue that I then listed—the preparation of explosive devices, robbery and extortion for the purpose of acquiring funds, intimidation, brutal beatings, the training of operational terrorist teams, the researching of improvised weapons, the targeting of victims and the maintenance of undiminished supplies of illegal armaments—we must now add our recent experience of murders carried out for blatantly political purposes.

Since the beginning of December alone, five men have been gunned down in public or murdered in their homes. The very dogs in the street in the communities involved know that it is the work of the IRA. Putting it more elegantly, the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) has described the so-called Direct Action Against Drugs group as a flag of convenience for the IRA. The hon. Member for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron) concurs. The RUC knows that they are right, and has said so. These murders were procured by the IRA.

The Government react to these killings with the deepest anger and concern. We have conveyed that in our public statements, and I have written to Senator Mitchell and the other members of the international body to draw the murders to their attention. They illustrate all too vividly the central importance of the issue of illegal arms. All the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland, Church leaders and community leaders, and the Irish Government, have condemned the murders in the most forthright terms. Although the murders themselves are revolting, almost as sickening has been the evasion of leading Sinn Fein people when they, too, have been called on to condemn them.

However disappointing it is, by reason of all these matters this is not the time, I must submit to the House, when we can sensibly say that the need for special provision for Northern Ireland has passed.

Like its predecessors, the current Act has enabled the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland to function effectively and fairly, despite ferocious terrorist attacks on it. In addition, it has set up a legal framework for action by the security forces against terrorists that is proportionate and effective, while yet providing individual citizens with appropriate safeguards.

The House will be grateful to Mr. John Rowe QC for his thorough reviews of the current Act and of the prevention of terrorism legislation in recent years. With Mr. Rowe, we believe that there is a continuing need for a special provision for Northern Ireland, and in the form of a new emergency provisions Act. Nevertheless, I judge that there can be no one in the House who does not regret the necessity for retaining any of this legislation. I have long made clear my wish to see conditions established that will mean that the emergency legislation has done its job and can be repealed. I am only too mindful of how easy it is for emergency legislation, once enacted, to stick within the statute book.

There have, of course, in recent times been changes in the scene, and welcome changes for the better: the ceasefires of August and October are foremost among them. I certainly acknowledge again the efforts of all who achieved them. Especially, I pay tribute to the resilience and courage of the police, the Army and all the ordinary people of Northern Ireland in resisting terrorism over 25 years.

The Government have not been slow to respond to these changes. On security, the Government's response has been positive and wide-ranging: routine military patrolling in support of the police is down by 80 per cent.; 1,600 troops, including three battalions, have been relocated from Northern Ireland; North Howard Street Mill and other security bases have been vacated, some demolished, and a number of security installations, including the tower at the Rosemount police station in Londonderry, have been removed; closed roads at the border with the Republic of Ireland have been opened to traffic; the majority of orders under the vehicle control zone order were revoked on 1 August 1995; all Northern Ireland exclusion orders have been lifted; and the civilian search unit has been disbanded.

These measures and a range of other steps, including changes to remission rates in prisons, give the lie direct to those who accuse the Government of foot-dragging or of refusing to build on the new situation. We will go further when I am advised by the Chief Constable that we can prudently do so.

In the political field, the Government are fully committed to achieving inclusive all-party negotiations aimed at a comprehensive political settlement based on consent. We wish to see the removal of what at present disqualifies Sinn Fein in particular from participating in those negotiations. We want to see it there, in common with other parties, in right of having established a commitment to exclusively democratic and peaceful methods, as the Downing street declaration makes clear is necessary.

It is a partial peace that we have in Northern Ireland today. It is no more than that. It is sometimes referred to simply as "peace" only because of the horrors of what for so long preceded it. As I said in our last debate on the Act,

"what is really needed to move the peace process forward is the ending of actions that rupture or menace the peace."

Since then, the opportunity to end those actions has not been taken. On the contrary, the murders that I have already mentioned illustrate how it has been cynically spurned. Therefore, in the opinion of the Government,

there is little room for debate as to whether the need has gone altogether for an emergency provisions Act for Northern Ireland; the evidence is too clear that it has not.

On the contrary: in the face of today's diminished but nevertheless established threat, the debate should be about what is a prudent and proportionate response to it. Let us remember that the current Act contains power to suspend many of its provisions—a power that has been exercised in respect of detention under section 36. That power is also incorporated in the Bill, and it would be exercisable even from the outset of the new Act if circumstances then warranted it.

There is also room for wider debate. For example, Mr. Rowe recommends that the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act, which applies only to Northern Ireland, and the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989, which applies in the main to the United Kingdom as a whole, should be consolidated in one comprehensive statute, providing all that is needed to cope with the perceived threat of terrorism anywhere in the United Kingdom.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and I believe that there is much merit in that. In our debate on 12 June, I spoke of the need for a

"wide-ranging look at all the options for permanent counter-terrorism legislation once a lasting peace is established".—[*Official Report*, 12 June 1995; Vol. 261, c. 503-509.]

Today I am very pleased to be able to announce that the distinguished Lord of Appeal in Ordinary, Lord Lloyd of Berwick, has agreed to lead such a review.

My right hon. and learned Friend and I have invited him to

"consider the future need for specific counter terrorism legislation in the United Kingdom, if the cessation of violence connected with the affairs of Northern Ireland leads to a lasting peace, taking into account the threat from other kinds of terrorism, and the United Kingdom's obligations under international law; and to make recommendations."

These new arrangements will not affect the annual review of the way in which the prevention of terrorism Act has operated in 1995. Mr. Rowe will duly report on the Act, as he has for the past two years.

I am also very glad to announce that Lord Lloyd will be assisted by a distinguished adviser from Northern Ireland, Mr. Justice Kerr, who is a judge of the High Court there. It will not be possible for Lord Lloyd's review to be completed in time for new legislation to be enacted before the current Act expires. Accordingly, in recognition of that situation, the Bill provides for its own expiry only two years after it takes effect, and it, too, will be generally subject to the need for renewal after its first year, under the provisions of clause 60, and contrary to the terms of the Opposition's amendment.

As to there being no power to amend the Act annually, for which we are criticised in the amendment, no predecessor statute, I believe, has ever incorporated such a power, and it would not be practicable to introduce one now.

There is one other salient question to which I should refer before I come to the detail of the Bill: the holding centres and the electronic recording of interviews conducted within them. The holding centres are, of course, police offices where a person suspected of terrorist offences and who has been arrested under section 14 of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 is detained for questioning, subject to substantial safeguards, which include a statutory maximum time limit of seven days for the power to detain. Like, I should think, every hon. Member, I look forward to the day when holding centres can pass into disuse, with all interviews being subject to rules under the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, but I am advised by the Chief Constable that that day has not yet come, and I accept that advice.

Meanwhile, however, I have decided—with the agreement of the Chief Constable—to introduce a system for the silent video recording of all such interviews, and I shall introduce for consultation a code of practice for that purpose in due course. The change will reflect what Lord Colville, in reviewing the Act, recommended in 1990.

I have discussed the whole difficult question at length with the Chief Constable. It is fair to remind the House that Mr. Rowe has recommended the audio recording of all such interviews, but, in the light of the Chief Constable's firm advice about the security connotations represented by the proposal, I cannot suggest to the House at this stage that it would be prudent to adopt it.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Who is running Northern Ireland—the Secretary of State or the Chief Constable? So far, the Secretary of State has said no fewer than three times that he has simply taken the Chief Constable's advice. What reasons did the Chief Constable give for refusing to recommend tape-recorded evidence?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The hon. Gentleman's opening question was rhetorical. I take responsibility for the running of Northern Ireland, and I am accountable to the House of Commons; but, on security matters, I seek the advice of my principal security adviser, who is the Chief Constable.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office will deal with that aspect more fully when he winds up the debate, but anyone who studies these matters—certainly anyone who has studied the reports to which I have referred—must note the existence of security connotations when an audio recording is made of the words used by anyone making a statement in a holding centre. Those security connotations exist, and must be taken seriously. I am not prepared to put people in Northern Ireland at further risk of death and maiming as a result of terrorism, and in this instance I will accept the Chief Constable's advice.

Silent video recording of interviews in the holding centres would, however, enhance the safeguards already available to those detained under the terrorism provisions. It would also reduce the time taken in criminal trials on the issue of whether confession statements were truly made voluntarily. It reinforces the protection already provided by the independent commissioner for the holding centres, Sir Louis Blom-Cooper, and his deputy, Dr. Norris—who, I remind the House, hold positions introduced for the first time by me. I pay tribute to their excellent work, although I regret that we cannot agree that a legal advice unit in a holding centre would be practical.

Over the past year, Sir Louis and Dr. Norris have paid almost a hundred visits to the holding centres, with the full co-operation of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, and have interviewed nearly 140 detainees. The number of persons now being detained has fallen considerably, and the number of complaints has dropped dramatically.

[Sir Patrick Mayhew]

Let me deal with the detail of the Bill. As I have said, it largely re-enacts the provisions of the existing Act; those are summarised in the explanatory and financial memorandum, so I can make this part of my speech fairly quickly. I propose to outline briefly the main features of the Bill, and to concentrate on changes and other points that the House may find particularly interesting. Before I do that, however, I shall comment on two specific aspects.

As the House will know, the provisions for countering terrorist finance—racketeering—have been removed. It is intended to replace them by measures covering all crime by means of the Proceeds of Crime (Northern Ireland) Order, published on 11 December 1995.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): The Secretary of State says that the anti-racketeering provisions are being removed from the emergency provisions legislation. That is appropriate, given their origins in the United States RICO—racketeer-influenced corrupt organisations—legislation, although they are narrower than that legislation. But will the legislation that the Secretary of State mentioned, which will apply to all crime, retain the same procedures with regard to authorised investigators and the same range of powers?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The provisions have proved very effective. The hon. Gentleman's question will be a matter for the reviewer; we—and no doubt others—will make representations in response to his request. I take the hon. Gentleman's point.

Part I contains provisions relating to the scheduled offences. It lists and defines them; makes arrangements for preliminary inquiries in magistrates courts; sets out the conditions for granting bail and for the holding in custody of young persons and their treatment on conviction; and provides for the setting of statutory time limits in scheduled cases. It continues to make special arrangements for the trial of scheduled offences—the continuation of the system of Diplock courts with its many associated safeguards. As I have said, this system has helped to ensure that justice has continued to be done in Northern Ireland. While the risk remains that jurors will be intimidated, we cannot return to trial by jury for cases in which terrorist offences are alleged.

I shall list the changes in part I. Certain offences have been removed from the schedule, and they are those which, in the light of experience, have proven not to be charged in terrorist cases. Other offences have been made capable of being certified out. These include section 8 and section 10 offences under the Theft Act (Northern Ireland) 1969—robbery with violence and aggravated burglary. Mr. Rowe's advice is that often cases involving these offences could safely be tried by jury, as they are often committed without terrorist involvement.

The Government are opposed, as a matter of principle, to the idea of the Attorney-General certifying scheduled offences in a matter on which we are criticised in the Opposition's amendment. On that matter we are supported by Mr. Rowe. It is not for the Attorney-General to specify those cases that should be subjected to special treatment that falls short of the norm to which citizens are entitled. On the contrary, the Attorney-General should, where appropriate, relieve the defendant by certifying out.

New and more flexible provisions are introduced for the setting of time limits on remand proceedings. In the context of custody time limits, the House will know that, to date, we have not been in a position to implement the provisions of section 8 of the 1991 Act. When accepting the inclusion of its predecessor in the 1987 Act, the Minister said that, before it came into effect, he would have to be confident that any scheme was unlikely to have the effect of procuring the release on bail, or even the discharge, of a person indicted for serious terrorist crime.

Evidence from the scheme of administrative time limits that is in place, which is closely modelled on section 8 and which we have been operating since 1992, has clearly demonstrated that, if a statutory scheme had been introduced, a number of potentially dangerous defendants on serious terrorist charges would have been released on bail. I acknowledge that we must look for improvement, and I shall speak about that in a moment.

Lord Colville, in his 1993 report on the EPA, and his successor, Mr. Rowe, in both his annual and five-yearly EPA reports in 1994, took a similar view of section 8. In the latter report, Mr. Rowe concluded that section 8 should not be re-enacted, as it was

"too rigid for Northern Ireland".

He favoured a new section in a broader form with less detail, permitting regulations to set the time limits and the circumstances in which they could be extended by the court. Clauses 8 and 9 give effect to those recommendations. They are substantially, but not entirely, the same as section 8 of the current Act.

Substantial progress has already been made in reducing the time that is spent in custody on remand by those facing serious charges. Baroness Denton of Wakefield reported in a written answer in another place on 7 December on the first three years of the administrative time limits scheme. She referred to a substantial reduction in the average time that is taken to process cases from first remand to arraignment, and to a particularly impressive fall over the past year in waiting times between arraignment and start of trial.

My noble Friend also announced a further reduction of the remand to arraignment limit from 11 months to 10 months, and she promised that the Northern Ireland Office, in conjunction with the other agencies, would continue to examine further ways in which procedures might be streamlined. There will be no slackening of our efforts further to reduce the time taken to process all cases where the defendant is in custody.

I can deal with part II more quickly. It relates to powers of arrest, search and seizure, and so on. It provides for the specific circumstances in which the police and Army have power under the Bill to enter and search premises, arrest and seize without a warrant, search for ammunition and transmitters, search for and seize explosives, examine documents, stop and question, and requisition and interfere with private property and public highways.

It creates a new offence of failing to stop and be searched when required to do so by a police officer or a member of the armed forces. At present, police officers and soldiers have a power to stop and undertake a search for munitions or transmitters, but anyone failing to stop for a search does not commit an offence under the Act, and the right of arrest under section 17 of the current Act does not apply. This amendment deals with that anomaly of no offence occurring under the Act in those circumstances.

Part III and schedule 2 deal with offences against public security and public order. I can deal quickly with those. Part III continues in force the offence of directing

a terrorist organisation. It lists the proscribed organisations and and it explains the offences relating to membership of or support for such organisations. The provisions make it an offence to dress in paramilitary clothing and forbid possession of any item for terrorist purposes, as well as the collecting or communicating of information likely to be of use to terrorists. They re-enact an offence in relation to training in the making or use of firearms or explosives.

We propose to strengthen the current provision in relation to proof of possession of information likely to be of use to terrorists, with evidence of proximity treated as proof unless proved otherwise. That is consistent with the onus of proof applied in the case of prohibited articles such as explosives, firearms and ammunition.

Part IV and schedule 3 deal with detention orders. Part IV contains the provisions on detention; those will be retained in their current lapsed state. Of course, those powers are and have been for some time the subject of controversy. Surely no one in the House would wish to see a situation in which the powers had to be exercised—I accept that. Nevertheless, it is the Chief Constable's advice to me, on security grounds, that those powers should be retained. Again, having considered it, I accept that advice.

Until we are satisfied that peace is permanent and irreversible, it would be irresponsible not to ask Parliament to re-enact that power. As I have said, the power of detention is one of a number of current counter-terrorist measures that the reviewer will deal with in the course of review. Mr. Rowe recommends removal of the power, but he will forgive me if I say that that derives from a judgment political in character that we do not share. It would be my intention, unless there is a substantial change in the state of affairs in relation to security, to let the provision lapse on the Bill's commencement.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): Will the Secretary of State confirm that that was also Lord Colville's advice?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Yes, that is true.

Part V deals with regulation of the provision of private security services. It continues to regulate all private security firms in Northern Ireland offering security guard services.

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): The Secretary of State is being unfair to Mr. Rowe. In his report on the operation of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991, Mr. Rowe made it absolutely clear that he did not want to do anything whatever to get into the political arena, and some of us would have been critical of him because he did not take into account in any way the fact that there had been ceasefires and that his review occurred during a much greater period of the troubles than we experience at present. Will the Secretary of State reconsider his statement that Mr. Rowe was acting on political grounds, rather than judging the matter as a lawyer?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: That is not a statement that I have made. I have said that, in this regard, Mr. Rowe's recommendation is political in character and represents a political judgment that we do not share. It will be found, on consulting the report, that Mr. Rowe refers to the provision being a backward step and to considerations of that sort.

It is perfectly possible for everyone, including Mr. Rowe, to hold that view. It is for me and, ultimately, for the House to decide whether the detention provision should continue and whether it is a backward or forward step. As Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, I hold responsibility for all these matters, and I must make the political judgment as well as the judgment on security grounds that is necessitated in this instance.

Part VI deals with people in custody under terrorism provisions. It sets out the statutory right of persons in police custody under the terrorism provisions—section 14 of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act. It deals with the right of a suspect to have a friend or relative informed of his detention and with the right of access to legal advice.

Part VII and schedule 4 deal with miscellaneous matters. Some changes are proposed to part VII. The discretionary power to make codes of practice in relation to the police and armed forces' powers of arrest, search and seizure has been removed. Such codes have not been issued during the lifetime of the current Act; the powers are being used less frequently, particularly the powers of stop, search and seizure, and we have no plans currently to implement those provisions. I propose instead to remit consideration of the subject of statutory codes of practice to the independent review of counter-terrorist legislation.

The basis of the appointment of the independent assessor of military complaints is changed from mandatory to discretionary. That will allow flexibility over the continuance of the post, which I instituted, in circumstances where military support to the RUC is greatly reduced or eliminated.

Part VIII and schedules 5 and 6 are supplementary. Part VIII contains the supplementary provisions, which include the change in the lifespan of the Bill to two years only. As with the current Act, on enactment the legislation must be renewed annually by both Houses of Parliament to remain in force.

Part VIII also looks forward to the time when the armed forces are no longer needed to act in support of the police. It provides for the separation of the powers of arrest, search and seizure for the police and Army, to allow the Army powers to be more easily suspended if, during the lifetime of the Act, that becomes a realistic prospect.

There are sensible and objective grounds for being very hopeful for the future of Northern Ireland and its people. I am determined that violence and the threat of violence shall not deflect us from our aims. I am equally determined that such anti-terrorism legislation as we adopt for the maintenance of order and of the rule of law shall be no more than is proportionate to the threat.

That is why I ask the House to renew the existing emergency powers, for a maximum of two years and with the appropriate amendments that I have mentioned. I greatly regret, therefore, that the Opposition are not prepared to agree to the Bill receiving a Second Reading for the wholly inadequate reasons set out in their amendment, with which I have dealt and which I ask the House to reject. I warmly commend the Bill to the House.

4.36 pm

Ms Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): I beg to move, to leave out from "That" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof,

"this House, whilst asserting the need to maintain confidence in the rule of law and in the administration of justice as the fundamental basis for achieving a just and stable society in Northern Ireland, declines to give a Second Reading to a Bill which fails to implement the main recommendations of Mr. John Rowe's review of the current legislation by refusing to remove internment without trial from the statute book and by failing to introduce tape recording of interviews with terrorist suspects, which fails to give this House the power to amend the statute when subject to annual renewal, which fails to make the statute subject to annual review, which fails to introduce 'certifying in' of scheduled offences, and which fails to establish a full time legal advice unit at holding centres."

I apologise to the House for an error in our reasoned amendment. We had little time to prepare it, as the Bill was introduced the day before the Christmas recess. Near the end, it states that the Bill

"fails to make the statute subject to annual review".

It is obvious when one studies the Bill in detail—I did not previously have time to do so—that it, does contain such a provision.

When the Minister winds up the debate, will he clarify the Secretary of State's answer to the question the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) asked about the fraud and racketeering provisions in the Bill? The subject is important; they are among the measures in the emergency provisions Act that the Opposition have always supported.

We have studied the Northern Ireland proceeds of crime legislation, which was introduced in the House in December. It would be useful to have it on record whether that legislation provides the same powers as are in the emergency provisions Act so that we can be clear that the fraud and anti-racketeering measures in the Bill are still in statute and apply to Northern Ireland.

The emergency provisions Act was first introduced in 1973. When introducing it, the then Secretary of State said:

"It is the Government's intention that none of the provisions of the Bill, if it is passed, should continue in force a moment longer than it is needed."—[*Official Report*, 17 April 1973; Vol. 855, c. 278.]

The Opposition have long argued for vigilance to ensure that temporary legislation, designed to deal with a specific emergency, does not become part of permanent law.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Home Secretary have had an opportunity in the past eight months to develop coherent anti-terrorist legislation that could be UK-wide and respond to the changing nature of terrorism, both within the UK and around the world.

In May, we offered to work with the Government to make common purpose to produce effective counter-terrorist legislation. We met Ministers in early June to discuss how we could merge the emergency provisions Act and the prevention of terrorism Act and how European provisions would fit and be considered.

Our meeting was positive and was reinforced publicly in June by the Secretary of State—as he made clear today—when he announced that he would set up an authoritative and independent review of the EPA and the PTA. It was pending—the review was going to happen. It seemed as if, in a constructive and bipartisan manner, the recommendation of J. J. Rowe's report would be implemented and that there would be a full and independent review of all existing anti-terrorist legislation so that a new Bill could be presented to the House. It should have meant that today, on the first sitting day in 1996, we would discuss counter-terrorist measures that would be most effective in response to the changing situation in Northern Ireland and the changing nature of terrorism worldwide.

Instead, we are faced with a short-term Bill that covers two years and, later this year, we shall be faced with the renewal of the emergency provisions Act for just two months. Without that renewal, the Government's mishandling would have resulted in our being left for part of the year with no anti-terrorist legislation in Northern Ireland and the potentially ludicrous situation of certain organisations being proscribed in Britain but not in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Paul Murphy (Torfaen): I entirely agree with my hon. Friend about the sorry state of affairs that she has described. Does she think that what has occurred will in any way jeopardise the bipartisan approach towards Northern Ireland by hon. Members on both sides of the House, which of course we all cherish and support?

Mr. Canavan: I do not.

Ms Mowlam: I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) for his intervention. I am—he is right—being critical of the Government in terms of the past eight months and I do so with a certain sadness. I have tried to find other instances of seven to eight months elapsing between a review being announced and the chairman of the review committee—we wish Mr. Justice Kerr well—being appointed. I came up with one similar instance, but it does not help the Government. A review of professions supplementary to medicine was announced in February and did not start until June, but the reason for the delay was a requirement for competitive tender.

I shall now answer my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) directly. Our opposition to the Bill does not disturb in any way our bipartisanship with the Government over the basis of the Downing street declaration and the framework document—and the principles enshrined in it—because, by consent, the Labour party stands for the principle enshrined in one of the options in that document. As long as that principle is there, and as long as the Government act in good faith on the basis of that document, we will not change our position. I am sure that the Government will not, either.

Mr. Canavan: Surely the Opposition's job is to be constructively critical of the Government rather than just to support them supinely. Using the word "bipartisanship" is an insult to hon. Members in other parties in the House, many of whom, like me, have grave reservations about what the Government are doing and are opposed, root and branch, to such oppressive legislation.

Ms Mowlam: I am sure that my hon. Friend will appreciate that, for the past six minutes, I have been constructively critical of precisely the legislation that he finds distasteful. As I make additional points, he will realise that I share many of his doubts about its nature. We should be constructively critical—as we have been about the transfer of prisoners. We should be

constructively critical about emergency legislation and policing but, in the end, if our principled stance is enshrined in one of the options in the Downing street declaration and the framework document, it would be unprincipled suddenly to oppose the Government for the sake of it simply because that is our job.

We will oppose the Government when we believe that they are making mistakes. Indeed, as I am making clear, I do not support the Government's Bill, but that in no way changes our principled stance. The attempts to gain the consent of the people, north and south, freely and concurrently given, in which the Government are indulging, are exactly what we would be doing if we were in government.

I see no way—I am being absolutely straight with the Secretary of State—in which I and my colleagues could have behaved differently over the efforts made by him and his colleagues during the past couple of months. If and when I believe that the Government are acting in bad faith, I shall certainly say so. When I want to be critical, as I do this afternoon, I shall be very critical, but that does not mean that, in terms of the peace process, we will criticise the Government when they are not acting in bad faith. It is central to the proceedings of the House in the coming months that we must be straight and honest with each other and do not allow arithmetic to play a role in the peace process. That is exactly what we are trying to avoid.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): I am sure that all hon. Members will be very pleased to hear the hon. Lady's reassurance on the bipartisan approach to the peace process. Will she be equally clear on whether there is still a bipartisan approach to the effective response to continuing terrorism, since we are discussing that, rather than the peace process, today?

Ms Mowlam: I would argue that there is a very clear and effective response to the continuing intimidation and violence on the streets of Northern Ireland. I am arguing very clearly that it was essential not to be caught in the position that we are in today. If, as I am arguing, the Secretary of State and the shadow Home Secretary had started a review eight months ago, they could have finished it by now. We would not be starting it; we would be finishing it. If that had happened, we would not hear, as some will say, that the Bill should not be introduced, or, as others will say, that it should be reinforced or stay as it is.

We could have been discussing a Bill that was not temporary and provisions that were not emergency provisions. We could have had a permanent Bill which responded to changing terrorism—new technology has become part of the terrorists' armoury. The Bill could have responded not only to terrorism in the United Kingdom, but to changing terrorism worldwide. That would have been an effective counter-terrorist response rather than a rehash of the 1991 Act.

I shall give a couple of examples to illustrate why I say that the Bill is a rehash of the 1991 Act. Clause 9—this is a minor point, but it demonstrates the slipshod approach and the apparent decision to regurgitate, in part, the 1991 Act—refers to section 8. The subsections of section 8 to which clause 9 refers are from the 1991 Act. They have been pasted into the Bill. I do not think that that is defensible; it is slipshod. It is not as if the Government have a large legislative programme—it is rather slim. One would think that, as it deals with important matters that are central to the future stability and maintenance of the rule of law in Northern Ireland, the Bill would have been drafted with much more care.

Clause 15 is another minor example of the slipshod approach. It refers to the remission of prisoners, which was discussed during the passage of the Northern Ireland (Remission of Sentences) Act 1995. It, too, has been pasted in from the 1991 Act, leading to a slipshod and messy schedule 5. Those two examples show that not only did we not need such a Bill, but that it is unacceptable because it is shoddily put together.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): The hon. Lady is giving her view straightforwardly and it is quite clear from what she has said that she believes that emergency provisions powers are still needed. If that is the case, why is she proposing to advise the Labour party to vote in a way which would remove emergency powers legislation? It is incomprehensible as a political approach.

Ms Mowlam: I am arguing that there must be effective counter-terrorist legislation. I do not believe that—

Mr. Carlile *rose*—

Ms Mowlam: Let me finish my point.

I do not believe, as was argued even by the Secretary of State in his Coleraine speech in 1992 and again today, that we need to keep emergency powers on the statute book when we do not have an emergency all the time. I am arguing a different point. Britain lacks effective counter-terrorist legislation. We have lived with a mish-mash of annual renewals of the EPA and the PTA, but it could have been different.

Another point which the Liberal Democrats always raise relates to the way in which the Opposition vote on counter-terrorist legislation. I shall give the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) a straight answer and allow him to intervene later. I should like to continue to develop the arguments and to give the reasons why we find the Bill unacceptable.

I am not alone in criticising the eight-month delay in starting the review. Hon. Members will bear in mind the comments of the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) that the Government were always difficult to get on the dance floor—that they were reticent and always hung back. In the debate in June, the hon. Member for Upper Bann said that he saw no reason for the delay in the review.

The Opposition would like to see new and innovative laws, but we face a Bill that we feel unable to support. I shall give some of the reasons. In answer to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery, I have made it clear that we would support sensible new legislation in response to terrorism. We do not oppose counter-terrorism legislation; we oppose the nature of the Bill.

We recognise that, while violence and intimidation continue on the streets of Northern Ireland, certain procedures under the existing system cannot be changed overnight or without introducing new legislation. That is a criticism that the Liberal Democrats always make of us. They say that we vote against a measure because we disagree with it in principle, but that in practice we do not leave anything on the books. If a review had been carried out during the past eight months, we could have had before us different legislation that we might have felt able to support.

[Ms Mowlam]

We have consistently maintained that the EPA is unacceptable. Our opposition to one of its central tenets—the power of imprisonment without trial—is well established, yet it remains in the Bill.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): Is not the hon. Lady just a mite worried about the signal that she and her party may be sending over the water to Northern Ireland? I have news for her. I do not believe that many people in Northern Ireland, certainly in terrorist organisations, will read the details of the Opposition's reasoned amendment, even with the errors put right. The headline will be, "Labour party votes against anti-terrorist legislation". If that does not worry her, it should.

Ms Mowlam: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I have a clear message for any member of the IRA or any Loyalist paramilitary group. Perhaps, if they do not hear the debate, they will read it. My message is that they should not doubt that a Labour Government would act as strongly to bring to justice those involved in acts of terror as the present Government. I have made it clear on numerous occasions in the past 12 months that no paramilitary group on either side would receive succour from the Opposition. That is straightforward.

We have stated time and time again the importance of working under the rule of law. That is paramount. Whether it be people who say they are taking direct action—whatever that means—or anyone else, it is unacceptable in a democratic, civilised society to act outside the rule of law. I hope that the hon. Gentlemen hears that message clearly. That does not mean that there are not parts of the EPA, such as internment, which do not work. It is not only the Opposition who say that. It is not as if the issue has simply arisen today.

Lord Colville, Mr. Baker and Mr. John Rowe have objected to the power of internment. They have all specifically advocated the removal of the power from the statute book. The message is not new. The reviews that have taken place have been ignored every time. We argue that they should not be ignored, and our amendment takes into account the sound and proper advice that has been given.

Mr. Wilshire: The hon. Lady fairly makes the point that the fact the Labour party is against internment without trial is not a new message, but are there not new circumstances which ought to be considered? Can the hon. Lady not conceive of the possibility that, if things got worse, internment without trial could be an inevitable response to execution without trial?

Ms Mowlam: If the hon. Gentleman wants execution or internment without trial, fine. If the hon. Gentleman ever forgets the difference between terrorists and us, he is not a member of a democratic institution such as the House of Commons. The difference, and the reason why we want to see the power of internment taken out of the Bill, is that we are a democratic institution. It is the role of the House of Commons to debate and expose to parliamentary scrutiny an exceptional power such as internment or any other power that the hon. Gentleman cares to dream up.

Unless we believe that parliamentary scrutiny works, we do a disservice to exactly the democratic institutions and procedures that we as a Parliament seek to develop in Northern Ireland. That is why we believe that internment should not be included in the Bill. If the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) or any other hon. Member wanted to seek to introduce such a power, an amendment could be debated in Parliament, and the decision would be for Parliament.

On the issue of remission of prison sentences, the House acted quickly and efficiently last year. If the hon. Member for Spelthorne sees a need for internment, it is surely the role of Parliament to discuss whether the Government should have the power to intern. Such a power should not lie dormant on the statute book for 25 years. We should have the guts to debate internment in the House of Commons if hon. Members express a desire to give the Government such a power. Our objection to the power of internment has been one of our main objections to the EPA for many years.

The Opposition also have doubts about the EPA because we have always argued for safeguards within the legislation. One such safeguard, to which the Secretary of State referred this afternoon, is electronic recording at holding centres. We believe that there should be video or audio taping, or some other such check, for no other reason than to protect both suspects and the police from accusations. Electronic recording would make a real difference to the problem of accusations about what has happened in holding centres.

The Secretary of State has announced this afternoon that there will be video taping without sound. The Opposition would like to see written into the Bill the checks and balances that Mr. Rowe and others have advocated for some time. Even the Secretary of State said back in June that the time had come to write checks and balances into the Bill. We were disappointed that that did not happen. We believe that the time has come for electronic recording. The reviewers believe that its time has come, and I thought that the Secretary of State had got to the point at which he believed that it was necessary. Checks and balances in the Bill would make a difference at the holding centres.

The main argument that has been made against electronic recording is that recordings could get into the wrong hands and create problems. I have read Sir Louis Blom-Cooper's detailed report on the checks and balances that could prevent that problem. The report is sufficient to allow the Government to go ahead with greater safeguards than video without sound would provide. I welcome the introduction of video recording. It is a move in the right direction, but it indicates a degree of indecision and confusion. I see no reason why we should not have gone the whole way and provided the same checks and balances that exist in other legislation such as the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1988.

Another reason why the Opposition have doubts about the EPA is, as the Secretary of State mentioned, the Diplock courts. In our reasoned amendment, we have made proposals which we hope will gain support across the House. We have argued for progressive change because—as the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery implied—one cannot abandon the existing procedures overnight. We cannot just flip from Diplock courts back to jury courts.

We accept that the imperfect so-called Diplock trial procedures cannot be abandoned overnight. We have advocated certifying in rather than certifying out, as that

would be another crucial safeguard. I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate those judges in Northern Ireland who have for many years operated a very difficult and contentious system with great professionalism and courage. That should be acknowledged in the House of Commons this afternoon.

I said in June that, if the current level of intimidation made an automatic shift to jury trials unacceptable—the Secretary of State said this afternoon that his security advice is that it does—we should begin to introduce measures to protect jurors and witnesses from intimidation. We could then begin to return to normality without making the move to jury trials until a material difference had occurred.

Trial by jury is a defining part of our criminal procedures. We are often surrounded by lawyers in the House, and it is important that lawyers are subject—as experts on every subject are—to an element of constraint by common sense and by those who have an uncomplicated commitment to fair play. That is why I consider it important that we return to jury trials.

Mr. Robert McCartney (North Down): Does the hon. Lady agree that perhaps the greatest travesties of justice in terrorist trials have occurred not in Diplock trials but in jury trials, and in jury trials held not in Northern Ireland but on the mainland?

Ms Mowlam: The hon. and learned Member is an example of the kind of lawyer to whom I was referring, and he has a detailed knowledge of the facts. I would argue that juries provide an element of fair play and common sense. Is the hon. and learned Gentleman arguing today that he thinks that there should be Diplock trials in terrorist cases on the mainland? If so, I look forward to his sharing that with the House. That suggestion could perhaps be discussed among the legal brethren, of whom I am not a member.

Mr. McNamara: Is not the point about the jury trials in England to which the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) referred that the evidence upon which the juries reached their decisions was contaminated?

Ms Mowlam: My hon. Friend is right. If the House will indulge me, I shall leave this matter where it is. From what I have heard from the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) and from my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), it is clear that we will return to this issue at some point.

I would not wish to leave the House in any doubt that, despite the paramilitary ceasefires in the past 16 months, the Opposition do not deny that killings have occurred. The House will remember the death of the post office worker Frank Kerr; others, such as William Elliot and Michael Harley, have died in the past 16 months. In addition, there were 167 punishment beatings last year. These must stop. The beatings cannot continue if we are to move the democratic peace process forward.

It should also be put on record that the punishment beatings have resulted in two suicides. Eddy McCloskey and Malachy Clarke committed suicide following punishment beatings, and their cases—particularly the latter—were discussed in the House in June.

The links between extortion, robberies and intimidation are becoming clearer day by day, particularly in drug trafficking—a subject that the Secretary of State touched on. Drug trafficking is a tragedy that makes many young lives a misery. To the families of Michael Mooney, Tony Kane, Paul Devine, Francis Collins, Christopher Johnson, Ian Lyons and Martin McCrory—all of whom have been murdered since last April—the professed motive becomes immaterial. For their families and loved ones, the loss is the same and the grief as great.

It is not acceptable to ignore the rule of law and to try to rule communities by fear. The persistence of brutality and intimidation on this level and the terrorising of local communities is especially repugnant when so many are engaged in a genuine search for a lasting peace. Democratic organisations do not use fear and intimidation to gain support, nor do they use pressure to discourage people from taking part in initiatives designed to promote reconciliation between divided communities. In a bipartisan way, the Opposition agree with the Secretary of State on the matter and call on the IRA to stop the murders of alleged drug dealers.

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): I am sorry to refer to an earlier part of the hon. Lady's speech, but she took me by surprise when she abandoned her references to "checks and balances" in terms of video recording and the endorsement and advocacy of audio recording. The hon. Lady kept referring to the checks and balances that would prevent such recordings being used for the benefit of terrorists. Will she elaborate on what those checks and balances might be?

Ms Mowlam: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for using the expression "checks and balances" in a misleading way. What I meant was that accusations of brutality—as have been made at the holding centre at Castlereagh—do no good either for the people who make the accusations or for the people who are accused and who have no way of proving whether they are innocent or guilty. By "checks and balances", I meant that audio and video recording would allow us to see what is happening. That would be to the benefit of everybody. People such as Lord Colville and Mr. Baker have argued for such recordings to be introduced at Castlereagh and at the Strand, and we would like to see that happen. If I did not make that clear or if I misled the hon. Gentleman, I apologise.

The Secretary of State has announced the introduction of video recording without sound. My point is that, if we are to have such a system, we should do it properly. I welcome that minor change, but it will be interesting to see whether the system will be continued following Sir Louis Blom-Cooper's next review. Does that answer the hon. Gentleman's question?

Mr. Maginnis *indicated dissent.*

Ms Mowlam: Okay, I will give up on that one.

The rule of law is paramount, and we have given a clear message—even though some hon. Members have questioned it—to terrorists on both sides that the Opposition will give no succour to anyone who breaches it. I should like to acknowledge the work of the security forces, because they have responded well and adapted to a new role. Their courage and determination to prevent criminal activity and to prosecute those involved continue

[Ms Mowlam]

unabated. I wish to commend in particular the recent efforts of the new drug unit in Belfast, which has been increased in size to try to respond to increasing drug trafficking in Northern Ireland.

The Opposition would have liked to have a common purpose with the Government on anti-terrorist legislation. If the Government had acted with alacrity in conducting a review, that could have been possible this afternoon. It is a matter of regret that it is not possible. We have tabled a reasoned amendment, which we hope will be accepted. In Committee, we will continue to try to make the desired changes to the Bill.

Mr. Alex Carlile : If the hon. Lady's view is accepted, there will be no Committee.

Ms Mowlam: There will be a Committee stage between Second and Third Reading. In answer to the hon. and learned Gentleman's barracking, I should like to make it clear that we will vote for our reasoned amendment. I had hoped that we would have had from the Secretary of State this afternoon some statement which would have permitted us to abstain on the substantive motion.

Some hon. Members worry that the powers in section 69 of the Act, which is now clause 60 of the Bill, will be needed if things deteriorate in the months ahead. We had hoped, as the Secretary of State said last June, that those powers could be put in reserve. That would have been some movement in relation to the past 16 months. We would have liked greater movement not only in relation to section 69, but in relation to the argument we have put this afternoon—that, if the Government had not acted so tardily, we would not have needed this debate.

Little has been proposed by the Secretary of State today. I make it clear that we are not asking for the powers to be removed from the Bill completely, but for them to be put into reserve. That could have been done with many of the powers, and it would have given an important signal to the people of Northern Ireland about the efforts being made to keep the peace process moving. It would also have given a clear signal to the terrorists that the powers were not being taken out of the Bill completely and that they could be used if the situation deteriorated.

We will vote twice against the legislation today, as we did in 1991. It is important to be consistent. In 1991, because of our objections to powers such as the power of internment, we voted against. It would be ironic if we were to change our position between 1991, when the troubles were rife, and now, after 16 months of ceasefire—although there is a lot of intimidation and violence on the streets.

In direct answer to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery, we do not want to have no anti-terrorist legislation on the statute book. We will fight hard in Committee to get some of the changes we want, but we will not vote against the Bill on Third Reading. Our position is logical and consistent. It is important that we do not leave the people of Northern Ireland without any emergency legislation.

My principal desire this afternoon has been to ensure that it will soon be possible not to have the emergency legislation, which we have had for 74 years. The peace process is at yet another crucial stage, as the Secretary of State said this afternoon. It might be at its most sensitive stage. We wish Senator Mitchell and his colleagues well in their work, and we look forward to their report. Working with the commission's report will be the best way forward.

No one is engaged in a zero sum game. It is only by co-operating that the peace process can be moved forward. If we think and act in terms of winners and losers, we shall all lose. I hope that the shifts in political arithmetic in the House will not encourage hon. Members to play a numbers game. That would betray the democratic future for Northern Ireland, towards which we are all working and on which the hopes of the people in Northern Ireland and elsewhere rest.

5.13 pm

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): It is a matter of great regret that the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) adopts the position towards the Bill that she has just announced. I strongly support the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) that the Labour party's position will send out entirely the wrong signals. It would have been far better if the House had been able to unite behind the Bill at this stage and not merely on Third Reading.

Some of the hon. Members who have been fortunate enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in previous debates on the emergency provisions and who have become seasoned participants may agree that, on occasion, our deliberations have been characterised by some repetition. Although that does not detract from the validity of the arguments, over the years the salient features have been well rehearsed.

Over the years, we have heard strong arguments from Opposition Members against the emergency provisions. They have argued that the emergency provisions abuse civil liberties, and are therefore inherently unjust. They have argued at times that, domestically, the provisions erode the integrity of the state and have a corrupting influence and that, overseas, they lower the standing of the United Kingdom in the eyes of other countries. We have heard the argument that it would be far better to counter terrorism through ordinary law and the ordinary criminal justice system. We have also heard it suggested that emergency provisions are counter-productive in so far as they provoke animosity and disaffection, and can arguably promote the terrorists' cause. All those arguments have been taken seriously, and they have been debated many times. The simple truth is that, in the judgment of Conservative Members, those arguments have failed to convince.

At best, the Opposition's arguments are over-simplistic; at worst, they are irresponsible. Conservatives have consistently maintained, first, that those who oppose the emergency provisions have failed to appreciate that the greatest threat to civil liberties comes from terrorism and not from emergency powers. Secondly, we have argued that those who have opposed the emergency provisions have failed to take account of the universal experience of democratic countries—that, when a democracy is challenged internally by those who do not share democratic values, additional powers are needed.

We believe that those who oppose the emergency provisions, which are still in place, have failed to perceive that they are not wholly draconian. They seek to maintain a balance, safeguarding the interests of the individual and

producing effective methods of counter-terrorism. Above all, we believe that those who oppose the emergency provisions have failed to pay sufficient heed to those in the front line of the fight against terrorism. Over the years, the consistent message from the Royal Ulster Constabulary and from the Army has been that the powers are needed. The Government have therefore been right to maintain emergency provisions and they are right to look to do so again in future.

We now hear a second argument—a different argument—against the emergency provisions. We began to hear it when we debated the prevention of terrorism Act last March. We heard it a little more clearly when we debated the emergency provisions in June, and we are hearing it much more clearly today. I am sure that I was not the only Member of Parliament to receive a letter from the Committee on the Administration of Justice, which is based in Belfast. I quote selectively. The letter says:

"there is no emergency in Northern Ireland and therefore there should be no emergency law. In our view emergency legislation is both unnecessary and counterproductive."

The same argument comes in the paper "Northern Ireland: An Emergency Ended?", which is produced by the international human rights working party of the Law Society of England and Wales. On page 42, it is argued that

"the emergency legislation is no longer appropriate".

The working party refers to the United Nations Human Rights Committee and its recommendation

"'that further concrete steps be taken so as . . . to dismantle the apparatus of laws infringing civil liberties'".

The body of lawyers writes:

"We agree. There is no compelling reason for delay. The emergency legislation should go as soon as possible."

I contend that the Government are entirely right to reject those arguments. With the demise of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991 imminent, the Government are right to reinstate emergency provisions, duly amended. I do not believe that there is any need to rehearse the argument or the evidence in great detail. The facts speak for themselves. In Northern Ireland, the terrorists continue to terrorise, and the murderers continue to murder. It is reasonable to believe that a significant number of terrorists keep open the possibility of returning to full-scale violence. It would therefore be not merely irresponsible but insane of the Government not to proceed with this measure; hence there is the strongest possible support on the Conservative Benches for the Bill.

More specifically, I wish to refer briefly to three aspects of the debate. First, I welcome the announcement of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State about the establishment of the review of counter-terrorist legislation. That, of course, was anticipated last June and we have already had a taste that, from some circles, there will be criticism that that has been late in coming and that the commission is long overdue. I reject that argument. I think that the Secretary of State's judgment has been right. It was all a question of timing. There had to be the right developments to enable the climate to exist for that work to be done effectively. Nevertheless, one looks forward to the findings of that review.

Secondly, the hon. Member for Redcar made much of the internment theme. I believe that the Opposition are wrong to condemn the retention of the detention powers of internment. I have consistently argued that there can be circumstances in which the reintroduction of internment is the lesser of evils. At a time of heightened terrorist activity, or anticipated heightened terrorist activity, internment can disrupt the command and communication structures of terrorists, prevent them from operating as they had planned and save lives. In such circumstances, it would be wholly wrong to eliminate the possibility of internment being reintroduced.

The suggestion that there should be a full-scale debate in Parliament, and perhaps a vote taken, prior to the reintroduction of internment is wholly counter-productive because it would destroy the effectiveness of the practice. The Government are right to retain in the present Bill the potential for the reintroduction of internment.

I hope that it will never be the case, but were it to be necessary for internment to return on a short-term basis, we would find it more acceptable than was the case in the 1970s. The anticipation of permanent peace and the taste of relative peace in Northern Ireland that is now being experienced will have the effect of ensuring that anyone who decided to return to full-scale violence would be unlikely to enjoy the level of community support that has hitherto existed.

Thirdly, on the introduction of electronic recordings in the holding centres, I give a cautious welcome to what my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State said. The clamour for electronic recordings has increased over the years. There has always been, and there remains, the strong argument that recording would deter co-operation, and that fear of retribution—of what terrorist organisations might do if they discovered how much or what information had been given—would silence detainees. That remains a valid argument, and the Government have been right to listen to it.

The introduction of silent video recordings is an acceptable way forward. It would deal with the real fear, or accusations, that violent physical assault can or does take place from time to time. The videos would demonstrate whether that was the case. The fact that they were silent would remove the fear that terrorist organisations might learn what had been said.

I applaud the decision to renew the emergency provisions. I believe that it was right, and I anticipate that my right hon. and hon. Friends will agree. Nevertheless, one looks forward to the time when such provisions will no longer be necessary. I therefore welcome the fact that the Government seek to reflect in the Bill the changing circumstances in Northern Ireland and the progress that has been made towards achieving permanent peace. That is evident from the reduction of the lifespan of the Act to two years; the transfer of the powers to deal with the confiscation of proceeds of terrorist-related activities to the ordinary criminal law; making it possible for the provisions to apply only to the Royal Ulster Constabulary and not to the Army as well; and establishing a major independent review of counter-terrorist legislation.

Nevertheless, while terrorist organisations remain in being, while their structures are in place and their weaponry is intact, the Government are surely right to consider that the time has not yet come to dispense with the emergency provisions.

5.24 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): Today we are starting to renew legislation that had its origins in the Special Powers Acts of the former Northern Ireland establishment. The imposition of direct rule has led to the introduction of the legislation that we are considering. The original legislation had won the admiration of the supporters of the apartheid regime in South Africa.

This legislation has taken out many of the reprehensible parts of the Special Powers Acts but, over the past 20 years, it has been widened in its scope and powers, and many of its provisions are as reprehensible as the powers that existed in the Special Powers Acts. Indeed, when we first discussed this legislation in the House, so revolutionary were its provisions and so far-reaching its changes to what was then Great Britain law that the first Standing Committee on the Bill was largely composed of QCs and barristers, past, present and future Attorneys-General and Solicitors-General and at least one future Lord Chancellor. It was a Committee, I am told, that would not have disgraced a Benchers' dining-in night at one of the Inns of Court.

Indeed, the membership of the Committee was so important, distinguished and heavyweight that the learned members insisted—and the Government of the day acquiesced—that we sat only in the late afternoons, so that my learned friends could attend their business and other interests in the mornings and early afternoons. In retrospect, I am not at all certain that the distinguished legal gentry greatly added to the sum of human knowledge.

What was significant about the membership of the Committee was that the House realised then, as I hope it does now, the enormity of its actions in bringing in legislation that would limit important civil liberties: retarding and restraining of the scope of jury trials; bending the rules of evidence; indefinite internment without trial. Those were only a few of the measures that were new to United Kingdom legislation—

Mr. Maginnis: No, that is not right.

Mr. McNamara: Those were only a few of the powers that were new to Great Britain legislation, certainly in the sphere with which we were then dealing.

Over the years, the powers have been systematically extended and widened. Even now, after 16 months of a cold peace, at least one fresh offence has been created—a further extension of powers. Again, the Government have done it in the most cavalier fashion by ignoring their own statutory body, the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights, all of whose members are appointees of the Secretary of State. Its opinion of what the Government were doing was worth nothing.

It is not the first time that successive Secretaries of State have acted in such a cavalier fashion in respect of SACHR. Indeed, its press notice strongly criticised the Government's failure to consult it in advance of the decision to renew the powers. The commission considered that the failure to consult was

"extremely disturbing as, not only was SACHR established under the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973 to advise the Secretary of State, but the Commission has, in the recent past, received specific assurances from the Government that it would be consulted on such matters."

SACHR was deeply concerned that the Government apparently intended to renew the emergency provisions legislation, without substantive change, for a further two years. It then made several other complaints.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) pointed out, I believe that the Government have lost a great opportunity to put before the House fresh legislation to deal with terrorism in the United Kingdom. It is a matter for debate whether there should be specific legislation that applies only to Northern Ireland. The chairman of SACHR, Mr. Michael Lavery, said:

"With sustained peace for some 16 months now, a significant opportunity exists to enhance the protection of individual human rights and civil liberties".

In its report of July 1995, the United Nations Human Rights Committee described the emergency provisions as "excessive" and called for the dismantling of

"the apparatus of laws infringing civil liberties which were designed for periods of emergency."

Regrettably, the Government have not accepted even the modest proposals in my hon. Friend's amendment. It is important for the Government to show some confidence in the peace process, but I believe that they have failed to do so.

SACHR proposed some interim measures. It said that internment, which has not been used for 20 years, should not be re-enacted; that jury trial should be restored for scheduled offences at the earliest opportunity; that the standard for admissibility of confessions should be raised to that applied to non-terrorist offences; and that the special powers under the EPA to stop, question and search people should be repealed. Instead, those powers have been extended.

It is the continuing presence of the internment power, that should make the House step back from re-enacting the legislation. During the recent troubles, the Provisional IRA had three great recruiting sergeants—internment without trial, Bloody Sunday and the deaths arising from the hunger strikes. We cannot bring the dead back to life, but the Government can, and should, apologise for Bloody Sunday—particularly as we now know, courtesy of the No. 10 minute which is in the Public Record Office, that, following the shootings in Derry, the Prime Minister warned the tribunal chairman, Lord Widgery. The minute states:

"It had to be remembered that we were in Northern Ireland fighting not only a military war but a propaganda war".

The Widgery tribunal was intended to be part of that propaganda war, and it was used as such. The Lord Chief Justice sought to restrict his own terms of reference, which was a most unusual approach. The minute states:

"The Lord Chief Justice said that he saw the exercise as a fact-finding exercise. The Tribunal would be asked to inquire into what happened, not into motives. It would help if the Inquiry could be restricted to what actually happened in those few minutes when men were shot and killed; this would enable the Tribunal to confine evidence to eye witnesses".

The decision not to examine "motives"—that is, the policy objectives—or those responsible for the policy set an unhappy precedent for all future inquiries, whether Stalker or the inquiry into the Gibraltar killings.

Of the three issues that I have raised, the House can do something about internment. The power has not been used since my right hon. Friends the noble Lord Merlyn-Rees and the Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) phased it

out, but it exists on the statute book in the form of clause 36. The explanatory and financial memorandum helpfully points out that, having granted the power, it is immediately suspended. But I suggest to the House that that is a legal fiction; it is a sleight of hand.

Clause 60(3) states:

"The Secretary of State may by order provide—

(c) that all or any of those provisions which are not for the time being in force shall come into force again and remain in force for a period not exceeding twelve months from the coming into operation of the order."

The Secretary of State may introduce the provision by order. Therefore, people may think that Parliament must approve that decision when it is taken, but that is not the case. Clause 58(2)(b) states:

"it is declared in the order or regulations that it appears to the Secretary of State that by reason of urgency it is necessary to make the order or regulations without a draft having been so approved."

The Secretary of State can introduce internment simply by signing an order and there is nothing that Parliament can do about it. We may have an opportunity to debate it 40 days later, but the power will be in force. The power of internment is alive and well and on the statute book.

Mr. Trimble: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman referred to subsection (3) of clause 58, which provides that, in the event of an order being made to reactivate the power in clause 36 at a time of emergency, the opportunity exists for the House to debate the matter. It is not an unusual provision in any way, and it is used in many analogous situations in the House. Therefore, I believe that it is wrong for the hon. Gentleman to suggest that Parliament has no control over the reactivation of clause 36, as it clearly has that power.

Mr. McNamara: I am making the point that parliamentary control will come 40 days after people have been interned. It is a load of legal nonsense to suggest that somehow the power has been removed from the statute book by virtue of its being abrogated and assuming that an order has been made. The power is there in all its glory the moment the Secretary of State wants to use it.

We have seen how counter-productive the use of the power of internment has been in the past. It was seen as being aimed entirely at one community. It is still talked about and the events of Bloody Sunday were a protest against the introduction of internment powers.

We should refer also to other issues that are not in the Act. There has been no attempt to grapple with the problem of lethal force in so far as it applies to the security forces. It was very fashionable to talk about the issue at the time of Private Clegg's release, and the Opposition have urged action in the area for some time. When speaking for the Opposition about the matter, my right hon. Friend Lord Archer stressed the need to introduce a penalty between manslaughter and murder for the security forces. The issue was hotly debated when Private Clegg was released, but it has now been forgotten. At the time of the McAnespie killing, it was intended to discuss the issue at the intergovernmental conference. Both Governments promised to do something about it, but little has been done.

As a consequence of Private Clegg's release, I would like to see provision in the Bill for an automatic Parole Board review of all life sentence prisoners after they have served the same time in prison as Private Clegg. I would also like to see some mention in legislation of the decision of the European Court of Human Rights with regard to the right to life and the way in which those involved in the Gibraltar killings were treated. That matter is yet to be debated in the House.

We must also know whether there are any other cases or proceedings pending to which the provision may apply and to which the Government may be a party. Those matters are of the utmost importance. There are also matters that come under different legislation but of which the EPA is the linchpin. They include the right of relatives of witnesses in coroners courts to receive witness statements before the inquest starts, and the right to cross-examination of members of the security forces at coroners' courts. All those matters need consideration.

The Bill should also contain some curtailing of the extension of the common law doctrine of common purpose, especially after the way in which it was used in some of the cases arising out of the disgraceful murder of two corporals in Casement park.

The legislation that we are being asked to renew does not relate to all the matters that I have raised, but they are part of the background of the situation. I agree with my hon. Friends that a great opportunity has been lost to try to use the situation to impart confidence and impetus to the peace process. My right hon. and hon. Friends will be quite right to oppose the Bill, if the reasoned amendment is not accepted.

5.40 pm

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Supporting the Bill gives me no pleasure whatever. I wish I did not have to, but I do so for one clear and simple reason—the conditions that originally made the emergency powers necessary have still not gone away. There is still no permanent return to normality. In Northern Ireland, there is still no universal renouncement of violence for political ends; there is still no decommissioning of weapons and explosives; and there is still no end to beatings, torture and exile.

Not only do those conditions continue, but there is now at least one extra reason for keeping up our guard and voting for the Bill. That reason is the lynch-mob killings in the nationalist community, by members of that community. Even if the five people recently murdered were guilty of a crime, there is no crime known to mankind that could ever justify summary execution as we have seen it on the streets of Northern Ireland in the past five weeks.

I applaud the Government—I again record my pleasure at hearing qualified continuing support from the Opposition—because they are striking a note of optimism. The Government show optimism by seeking only a two-year, not a five-year, extension. They show optimism by excluding some of the current provisions, and by promising to keep all other powers under review.

The Government show optimism, which the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) has not noticed or is not prepared to give them credit for. The thrust of her speech, if I understand it correctly, was that the Bill shows no response to changes in circumstances in Northern Ireland, or too little. I refer the hon. Lady, and anybody tempted to agree with her, to the ever-growing list of responses to the changing security position. I refer her to the comment by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State that the Bill itself is a response.

[Mr. David Wilshire]

There are changes in the Bill which will alter the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991. I do not believe that those changes are too few—perhaps they are too many. However, I am prepared to give the Government the benefit of the doubt. Even this afternoon, my right hon. Friend's speech showed a response. The idea that there has been no response, or too little, can be dismissed out of hand.

Although not many people attend these debates, those who do so will be well aware that I am much less optimistic than my colleagues on the Front Bench. Nevertheless, I salute unreservedly the progress that they have made. I applaud the determination to keep the peace process on track shown by both the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State. I rejoice with the people of the Province at the huge improvements in their way of life. I wish, as I am sure the House wishes, only that the improvements had been even greater in the past year.

Sadly, I have little doubt that there will be those in the Province, in the Republic and in the United States who will portray the Bill as proof that the House wishes to repress the nationalist community. They will claim that it is proof that we wish to deny democracy to the Province, and they will see the Bill as proof that we wish to undermine the rule of law. That is total and utter nonsense.

The true purpose of the Bill is the exact opposite of what is claimed by Sinn Fein-IRA. It is the inevitable response to the continuing terrorism of Sinn Fein-IRA. Sinn Fein-IRA, not the Government, is now the real repressor of the nationalist community. Sinn Fein-IRA is bludgeoning into cowed silence the community that it claims to represent, but it can get only 10 per cent. support in a secret ballot when the guns are not to be seen. Sinn Fein-IRA, not the Government, is the real denier of democracy in the Province. Sinn Fein threatens to resume the use of the bullet and the bomb if it does not get its way.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Does the hon. Member accept that suspicions are very strong in Northern Ireland that Sinn Fein has not done enough to curtail the current spate of drug-related murders, attributed to the IRA?

Mr. Wilshire: The hon. Gentleman is being rather generous in saying that Sinn Fein-IRA has not done enough. Perhaps somebody could tell me what Sinn Fein-IRA has done to try to stop those foul murders. If somebody knows something, I look forward to being told. However, I expect that the hon. Gentleman agrees with me that it has done absolutely nothing, and that is despicable.

Sinn Fein-IRA, not the Government, is busily trying to undermine the rule of law in the Province. It has taken unto itself the role of investigator, of prosecutor, of judge and—worst of all—of executioner. While each continuing manifestation of terrorism is enough to justify support for the Bill, the five recent murders make the case utterly overwhelming.

Over the past five weeks, five nationalists have been murdered by members of their own community. The House must ask why that has happened. In my judgment, the answer is that a small number of evil psychopaths believe that their wish for a united Ireland entitles them to play God—or perhaps Satan. Their approach is stark. There is no need in their world for formal investigation; no need to test anything that they consider to be evidence; no need to allow anybody whom they consider guilty to defend himself; and no need to provide for any appeal. In their world, in their ideology and in their twisted minds, all that is necessary is to blow men's faces away with a shotgun, and not even to say sorry.

The House must ask another question—who are the evil people who perpetrate those acts on the streets of Northern Ireland? I have no doubt that they are members of Sinn Fein-IRA. If I understood the speech by the hon. Member for Redcar, she too believes that that is the case. I think that she is right, and I am convinced that I am, too. Those who have been charged with investigating those murders say so; it does not pay to sneer at the RUC or at the security services just because they are what they are. They say that the evidence is clear. Furthermore, the leading members of all the democratic parties in the Province say so too. I am particularly impressed by the comments made by leading members of the SDLP. My experience of Northern Ireland affairs tells me that, when the SDLP speaks about the nationalist community, the House does well to listen, and the SDLP confirms what the hon. Member for Redcar said this afternoon.

The reason why I am certain that the murders are the work of Sinn Fein-IRA is that Sinn Fein spokesmen will not condemn them. Their evasiveness and twisting and turning on radio and television have been sickening. If those killings are not the work of the IRA, why do not Adams and McGuinness condemn them? The only reason I can think of is that they are clear in their minds that the killings are the work of the IRA, and they are not allowed by their godfathers to condemn them.

Before the House decides later tonight how to vote, I urge it to think through the reasons for those killings. I offer three possible reasons: first, using the twisted logic of Sinn Fein-IRA, those foul murders provide a bargaining chip ahead of Senator Mitchell's report. Secondly, Sinn Fein-IRA appears to need the profits from drug dealing; and thirdly, it is losing control of those it calls "its people". History teaches that Sinn Fein-IRA is perfectly willing to kill its own people to strengthen its hand. If Senator Mitchell confirms what I believe to be true—that Sinn Fein-IRA needs to do more to convince us that it is committed to permanent peace and democratic change—it will be very handy for it to use the bargaining chip of offering to stop the killings, the beatings and the torture. That is the sickening logic of people of this sort.

The evidence about the IRA's finances which is stacking up suggests to me that its funds are drying up. Inside the Province and in the United Kingdom generally, the police crackdown has been singularly successful. The IRA's ill-gotten gains are now much harder to come by. The international funds that used to be surreptitiously sent to the terrorists are now going to legitimate economic development projects. That being so, any criminal mind—not just the mind of a terrorist—will turn to other ways of filling the coffers. Unfortunately, drugs are becoming as much as a problem throughout the island of Ireland as they are in the rest of the United Kingdom, and I think it inevitable that both terrorist camps will see them as a source of easy money to replace the funds that they have lost.

I see Sinn Fein-IRA's loss of control as the key reason for the dreadful murders. The other reasons certainly contribute, but it is the loss of control above all else that

begins to explain what has been going on. In recent months, I have seen for myself what the peace process has done to boost a return to what other parts of the United Kingdom consider normal policing and the normal rule of law. I have also seen the huge popularity of that return among people of both traditions in the Province.

I have been to places such as Newry, Crossmaglen and west Belfast; an English Conservative of my views would not formerly have been seen in such places. The fact that I can go there and move about freely is certainly a sign of progress. I have seen for myself that the RUC has changed—if indeed it ever was like the image portrayed by the nationalist community. It is being accepted now.

I commend to the House an example of that, which I learned in Newry. It has become possible to hold careers exhibitions for recruitment to the British Army and the RUC even in places along the border with the Republic. It has even got to the point where young people will visit the recruiting stands despite the fact that they are picketed by Sinn Fein-IRA.

Small wonder, then, that the latter is worried. Its spokesmen go on television and radio to claim that policing and the rule of law do not exist in the nationalist areas, but I and others have seen the people of such areas turning to the RUC for help and protection. It is that which Sinn Fein-IRA finds utterly unacceptable, which is why it is still prepared to kill, threaten and intimidate.

Despite the hard-won progress with the peace process, I believe that we continue to face a threat and a new set of evils. The continuing beatings and torture, and the latest murders, all produce fear. Fear in turn produces silence. In such circumstances, every democratic society has to contemplate drastic measures. My hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) put his finger on it: some of the measures in the Bill may be the lesser of two evils, but any democratic society must defend itself and its people against those who do not uphold the standards to which we subscribe.

I really wish that Northern Ireland was a place that did not need these emergency provisions, but it is Sinn Fein-IRA, not the Government, which continues to make them necessary. They will remain necessary until all political violence is permanently over; until all parties are committed solely to democratic means of working for change; and until illegal weapons and explosives are decommissioned.

I do not believe that the House or the Government have any choice if we are properly to defend democracy and protect the people of all the United Kingdom. Our only choice at this stage is to support the Bill. Like all hon. Members, like all the people of the United Kingdom and like everyone in the Province, however, I hope and pray that this is the last time the House will ever be asked to support this legislation.

5.57 pm

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): A few weeks ago, when President Clinton came to Northern Ireland, he reflected in what he had to say publicly that which his Administration and officials had said privately to Ulster Unionists during the past couple of years—that there was no place in a democracy for violence and murder. He added:

"You must stand firm against terror. You must say to those who still use violence for political objectives—you are the past; your day is over. Violence has no place at the table of democracy; and no role in the future of this land."

How I wish that those who try to tell us that the emergency legislation is redundant, or partly so, could be persuaded to examine the situation in Northern Ireland in the light of the Clinton criteria—the same criteria as those set out time and again by our Prime Minister.

Lest there be any misconception in the House about what is happening in Northern Ireland, I must take this opportunity to put the record straight.

The joint British and Irish Downing street declaration was agreed in December 1993 and was, with helpful intentions, unequivocally endorsed by the United States Administration. It obliges all concerned, including the terrorist organisations within both traditions, to accept that the constitutional future of Northern Ireland can be decided only with the consent of its people, given through the ballot box. However, even now, Sinn Fein-IRA has not accepted the Downing street declaration or the principle of democratic consent. Of course, Sinn Fein-IRA has continued to refuse to commit itself to a permanent cessation of violence. Instead, it has used the 31 August 1994 ceasefire to negate the spirit of the Downing street declaration and as the basis for a series of political demands. There is certainly no evidence of any principle eschewal of violence or concern for the greater good of society and all Government attempts to accommodate a series of supposed IRA concerns have been met by negative and threatening responses.

I refer to Sinn Fein in particular, not because I am unaware of the terror and suffering which has been inflicted by loyalist terror groups but because loyalist organisations have at least accepted, albeit conditionally, that there is a need to decommission illegal weapons and explosives and they have pledged themselves to observe a "no first strike" policy.

One of the co-founders of Families Against Intimidation and Terror, or FAIT, recently listed the reality of IRA activity as experienced at grass-roots level in republican areas. Henry Robinson, himself a reformed republican terrorist, points out that terrorist organisations are still intact with their command structures in place, illegal activity is still on-going and fear and intimidation are commonplace. He is also right to say that Northern Ireland paramilitaries have never renounced violence in the way that was required of the Palestine Liberation Organisation and the African National Congress, for example.

Despite concessions by the British and Irish Governments, the IRA has given no quarter to the people who run foul of its code, nor has it accepted the democratic view that brutal and summary justice and capital punishment are not options. The IRA has been responsible for 169 of the 261 barbaric beatings and the eight murders that have occurred in the past 16 months. How can anyone who is genuinely concerned with the welfare and security of ordinary law-abiding citizens in Northern Ireland seriously suggest that there is no need for the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act?

When I speak of the ordinary citizen in Northern Ireland I am talking about more than 90 per cent. of the community. Those who view terrorism from afar may not realise that Sinn Fein-IRA achieved the support of only

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4.4 and 4.8 per cent. of the total Northern Ireland electorate in the European elections in 1989 and 1994. Even in the last two local government elections in 1989 and 1993, where well-known local candidates would have tended to maximise the potential vote, Sinn Fein gained the support of only 6.3 and 6.8 per cent. respectively of the electorate.

Herein lies the Sinn Fein-IRA dilemma. How to adapt to the political role of being a small minority of a minority is never quite obvious when logic is clouded by the debris of a Semtex bomb or distorted by the crack of an AK47 assault rifle. That is why there is an absolute necessity to remove the deadly influence of illegal weapons from the Northern Ireland equation.

It is generally believed that the IRA holds 80 to 100 tonnes of modern sophisticated weaponry, while loyalist terrorists have another seven or eight tonnes. The IRA also possesses the capability to compound an efficient home-made explosive, or HME, which, when boosted by a small amount of commercial explosive such as Semtex, has the devastating power that was seen at Oklahoma and at the Baltic exchange in the City. With about 2.5 tonnes of Semtex, the IRA has the potential—using mainly HME with a 1 kg Semtex catalyst—to detonate an Oklahoma-type bomb every day for the next seven years.

In addition to their bomb-making ability, the Provos can boast enough high-velocity assault rifles to equip two Army battalions. It has more than a dozen Duska half-inch heavy machine guns capable of shooting down helicopters, numerous 7.62 mm general-purpose machine guns, up to a dozen SAM 7s—surface-to-air missiles—and a significant number of RPG7 anti-armour rockets. The armoury also includes snipers' rifles and ammunition and a multitude of submachine guns, small arms and flame-throwers. Those resources are adequate to keep a terrorist campaign going for at least the next 15 to 20 years.

Against that background, the House should try to make a considered and balanced judgment when evaluating the need to renew the emergency provisions legislation. There is a great deal of talk about infringing the human rights of the individual, but, coming from Northern Ireland, perhaps one has a keener perception of where the real denial of rights occurs and who are the chief offenders.

The Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act is but part of a very complex package that is necessary to safeguard the community to which I belong. In the face of the IRA's present rolling resumption of violence, it has been and remains an essential element in the armoury of the police. I believe that it will remain so until there is disarmament by terrorists and disbandment of their murderous organisations.

That is why the Ulster Unionist party has advocated and supported the establishment of a disarmament commission comprising people of international repute. I regret that events led to the commission being obliged to commence its work so close to the Christmas recess and now having to work to an impossible schedule.

The members of the commission, coming from Finland, Canada and the United States, barely had time to read themselves into the complex circumstances of Northern Ireland before the holiday break disrupted their endeavours. They are planning to resume work this week—seven or eight days before the report is expected. A good idea has become mission impossible because of the holidays, because of the snow in Washington which has prevented some people from flying out, and especially in the light of the existing level of violence which, in the month of December, when five people were murdered by terrorists, was higher than the terrorist violence in 1984, 1985, 1986, 1989 and 1994.

I appeal to the Government, and my party will do all that it can to co-operate in the matter, immediately to extend the time scale for the commission by up to six weeks. The adjustment for which I ask is minor when taken against the background of 26 years of terror and uncertainty. The commission having committed itself to examine disarmament, it is important that it is able to do its work properly and to present before the eyes of the world—we all recognise the importance of international opinion—the real picture of what ordinary, decent people in Northern Ireland and in the rest of the United Kingdom must face and fear at the hands of 5 per cent. of the Northern Ireland community.

The Secretary of State and the Minister of State must know that I am right. I hope that they will advise the Prime Minister of the need for patience and perseverance. Unless there is disarmament, there will be no opportunity to move the present tenuous ceasefire, which belongs exclusively to the terrorists—it is held like the sword of Damocles over all our heads—into a proper peace process, which can be the possession of the entire community.

I thank the Minister with responsibility for security matters in Northern Ireland for the sensitive and sympathetic manner in which he has sought to reassure the security services and, especially, the police during what has been a difficult period for them. They have welcomed the ceasefire, as we all have, but they are bombarded with thoughtless and foolish rumours about the future of the RUC. Members of that service realise the importance of remaining alert, being properly equipped and of being supported by the strength of the law. Those are reasons why the EPA must be renewed.

We would be negligent if we left our police service vulnerable to the potential for violence. There are so many reasons for doubt among the members of the RUC. Having stood for so long between the terrorist and the law-abiding community, it is imperative that the House endorses the good work that the Minister of State has been doing in seeking to sustain the morale of the RUC. I am concerned that consultations and the inevitable rumours that surround them may have a debilitating effect that the worst onslaught of terrorist violence has never been able to achieve.

We have had the police authority inquiry, the RUC's own internal examination and the two-pronged study of the Northern Ireland Office, one prong dealing with the administration of the service and the other with its future and size. There is genuine concern among those who have done so much to enable a high degree of normality to be maintained, even during the worst of the violence. We cannot let these people down. When it comes to their future, there must not be a little adjusting here and a little tampering there. There must be no surprises. There must be a package produced after full and meaningful consultation.

We should not seek to isolate the EPA from the need to ensure that the complex issues pertaining to peace in Northern Ireland are seen in their broadest perspective. Of course my party would welcome changes that heralded normality, but it would be more than concerned if the devious devices of the 5 per cent. of the population who posture and threaten with bomb and bullet were allowed to erode the interests of society.

The Secretary of State has promised that interrogations will be video recorded. The hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) has argued that the process should be extended to include audio recording. I was a little sorry for the hon. Lady today because she appeared to be rather like Janus, looking forward to reality in the sense that the EPA is essential while looking back and pretending that it might be tampered with to an extent that would make it entirely ineffective. I felt that a Labour party tactic was being portrayed as a principle. It is especially disappointing that that should be so when we may well be moving into an election phase.

We do not know which party will form the next Government. Northern Ireland cannot afford indecision over the years. That has been proved.

I am disappointed that the Secretary of State has decided to implement the recommendation that video cameras should be introduced. I believe that the system will not work. At least it will not work for the forces of law and order. Instead, it will work for the terrorist. In this instance, the hon. Member for Redcar has become slightly confused. There is no check or balance when a lawyer demands in court to see the video recording, as he or she would be obliged to do. The recording will be seen by the public or conveyed to the public by a member of the court service.

It is not realistic to say, "Put the cameras up there above his head and we shall not know what the terrorist is saying. We shall not be able to elicit that from a view of the top of his head." The IRA will know how to counter that approach. Every IRA man going into the holding centre will be told, "You do not strip off your clothes and lie on the floor any more. You don't crawl under the table. You sit on the chair, you look at the ceiling and you keep your mouth tight shut. If you don't do that, we shall know that you are co-operating with your interrogators." There goes a vital source of information for the police, which will bear on our hope to enforce law and order in the most difficult circumstances.

The Secretary of State has talked about the element of the Act that will deal with those sanctioning and directing terrorism. I welcome that. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has been assured, and so have I, that the present killings are being sanctioned at the highest level by the army council. We know who has replaced Martin McGuinness as officer commanding northern command of the Provisional IRA. Will that gentleman be brought in for questioning and, I hope, charged with an offence? The Minister of State will give great reassurance if he is able to tell me that that will happen.

The Government have a difficult job. By their minor adjustments, they are trying to elicit a modicum of decency from those who are members of illegal organisations. They must know by now, after 16 months of bending over backwards to make accommodations, that those people are not to be influenced.

I am disappointed with the Opposition amendment, because it seems to suggest that they expect that terrorists are basically decent chaps who are motivated to barbaric acts of violence and murder only because the Government meet their responsibility to society to try to prevent them from doing so.

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): Can the hon. Gentleman be helpful to the House and tell us the specific wording in the amendment that led him to make those comments?

Mr. Maginnis: I was just about to do that and to suggest that all the hoo-ha about internment was verging on the hypocritical, because on enactment, if I read the Bill correctly, internment will be put into cold storage, as the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) indicated.

Mr. McNamara: The whole point of that part of my speech was that internment was not in cold storage and that the Secretary of State could introduce it tomorrow if he wanted to.

Mr. Maginnis: That is strange logic from the hon. Gentleman. Internment is in cold storage until such time as the Secretary of State introduces it, and then within 40 days—not after 40 days, as the hon. Gentleman suggested—the matter will be debated in the House.

Is there no understanding among Opposition Members who have railed against it that there could be an occasion when the 5 per cent., the terrorists who have 100 tonnes of weapons, go back to full-scale violence, and—perhaps I say this more in hope than in expectation—not only this Government but the Irish Government find that unacceptable? As was pointed out by a Conservative Member, what better way would there be to disrupt the command and control structure of IRA-Sinn Fein, or any other terrorist organisation, than to take into internment quickly and effectively those who command the operation?

In July 1994, seven weeks before the IRA ceasefire, my party prepared a paper, which, I believe, was given to the Prime Minister. We predicted a ceasefire and cautioned that the moment the Government got into debate or meetings with IRA-Sinn Fein, they would be tied to that process: Sinn Fein could walk away, but the Government would be unable to do so, because they would be accused of abandoning the so-called peace process. Now we find that a very clear division is being manufactured, which we predicted, between Sinn Fein and the IRA. It does not really exist. Martin McGuinness may, nominally, no longer be head of northern command of the IRA, but we know that in practice he is still the same powerful, ruthless killer he always was.

Can hon. Members see the situation that is being manufactured? More and more we shall hear people, like Mitchel McLaughlin, on television saying, "Of course we do not control the IRA. We do not have any say over what it does." Again, we predicted that in our paper of 11 July 1994, in which we pointed out that Sinn Fein would employ the tactic of regretting, while understanding, the violence of the IRA. That is happening now.

On 28 June 1995, we said that Martin McGuinness had ordered an end to the ceasefire—not an immediate end but a rolling resumption of violence. We were criticised

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for doing so, because, apparently, if one tells the truth, one does not want the peace to succeed. What a load of rubbish. Look at what has happened since. Every effort was made to provoke people on to the streets in July and August to create confrontation. When, by and large, the people of the Ormeau road would not listen to the blandishments of people like Brian Gillan, who came across the city to try to provoke them, the next tactic was tried, which resulted in a spate of burnings and arson that was greater in intensity than has occurred for quite a number of years. When ordinary people refused to be provoked by such desecration to their churches, schools and homes, the killings started. They started in a way that is meant to be acceptable, because, allegedly, drug dealers were killed, and none of us likes drug dealers, but shall we see not eight but 80 or 100 of those petty criminals who have been labelled as drug dealers killed? It will not stop that trade—we all know that.

The Royal Ulster Constabulary has increased its efforts to bring the drugs trade under control, and I am sure that the Minister will be able to tell us that it is succeeding. It is a very difficult job to get the big players, but the amount of drugs that have been captured and the number of people who have been charged have risen dramatically over the past year. That is what the people on the ground want. They want the police, and they accept the police doing their job. What hypocrisy for Sinn Fein-IRA to say that part of the reason for the killing is that the police are not acceptable in certain areas in Northern Ireland. A fairly recent public opinion poll showed that the RUC is acceptable to more than 80 per cent. of the population, and, indeed, to 75 per cent. of the Roman Catholic population, in carrying out its day-to-day duties. I think that there is not a constabulary throughout the whole of the United Kingdom and, indeed, the Irish Republic that would not be proud of and pleased with that degree of acceptability.

From where does the criticism come? It comes from those who would put themselves in the place of the police and who are acceptable to only 5 per cent. of the entire population. It is no wonder that Mr. Gerry Adams has disappeared from our television screens. Perhaps he has gone to his holiday home—one, I assume, he purchased out of the savings from his social security benefits—down in Cooley in the Irish Republic.

I have described the reality of life in Northern Ireland as it is now, as experienced by my colleagues, by me and by society as a whole. We need no tinkering or tampering with the law or the security services at this stage Show us normality, and we will show imagination in accepting change; but let us not, by a thousand cuts, inflict death and destruction on the people of Northern Ireland.

6.30 pm

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): I hope that the House will excuse me if I drag the debate back to what it is supposed to be about—whether we need the Bill.

I am disappointed and perplexed by some of the opposition to the legislation. It seems to be common ground—certainly between Conservative Members, and, I understand, among Official Unionists, Liberal Democrats and others—that an Act of this nature is required. I had thought that the fresh, fragrant new Labour party held the same view, and, having read the amendment, I hoped that the presence of a new team of Northern Ireland spokesmen might produce a fragrant new approach; but it did not.

Apparently, we are expected to accept the view that it is possible to vote against the Second Reading of the Bill—against the principle of it—on specious grounds. If she examines her conscience, the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) may agree that, although there may be an argument for it, the "certifying in" of scheduled offences is hardly fundamental to the Bill; nor, I should have thought, is the establishment of a full-time legal advice unit at holding centres. Again, there may be arguments for such a unit: it may be a splendid idea, although I have not yet thought of any such arguments. Surely, however, both proposals should be contained in amendments or new clauses tabled in Committee or on Report.

I assume that the "annual review" business has now disappeared from sight. What remains, in an allegedly reasoned amendment, is the question of internment without trial. I have never doubted the integrity of Labour's new Northern Ireland spokesman, and never will, but she justifies the view that such a review is fundamental on the basis that it was considered fundamental by the old, less fresh Labour party some years ago. She may wish to bear it in mind that a number of Labour politicians—the same is true of the Labour party as a whole—have moved away from more fundamental positions than that.

I understand that, at one stage, the Labour party was rather in favour of socialism; and other jolly ideas. Over the past year or so, it has moved rather rapidly away from such ideas. If the Labour party can drop something as fundamental as the belief that created the party itself, surely it can re-examine its view that internment without trial, although a benefit to the Act, should be put into cold storage.

The Opposition Members who had a slight argument about the meaning of "cold storage" were not really in dispute. If we want something to remain fresh and available, we put it into the refrigerator and take it out when we need it. That is exactly what would happen in this instance. Can any hon. Member imagine a Secretary of State for Northern Ireland waking up one morning and saying, "What shall I do today? I think that I will introduce internment without trial." The idea is ludicrous: the circumstances would have to be dire and dangerous. I hope that the Opposition will now realise that, far from being reasoned, their amendment is entirely unreasonable.

I do not want to engage in tedious repetition, but anyone who doubts the need for the Act had only to listen—at some length, if I may say so—to the speech of the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis), who speaks on security matters for the Ulster Unionists. He gave all the details that the House needed to hear about the armaments that exist, the murders that have been committed and the potential for further murders. Of course we need the Act, and of course we need a fundamental review of anti-terrorist legislation. That review should be carried out carefully. I am sure that everyone will have an opportunity to express his views, and I hope that the legislation will eventually apply to the whole of the United Kingdom.

In the meantime, however, no one with good will or any common sense could say that we do not need the Act. I am not saying that the Bill is perfect—no Bill that I have

discussed in the House has ever turned out to be perfect—but points and cases can be argued in Committee and on Report. I believe that signals from over the water would now be much more promising if the House expressed a concerted view, and supported a Bill that is certainly necessary.

6.35 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): It is some years since I last spoke on behalf of my party in a debate on security in Northern Ireland. I believe that, on the last such occasion, our safety on the mainland—and, indeed, in the House—was being continually threatened: the situation was extremely dangerous. I welcome the progress that has been made recently—the fact that there is peace in Northern Ireland, and the degree of optimism that has been expressed on all sides. The road to a permanent peace is treacherous, however. We see a forest full of trees, rocks and other obstacles, and we would be foolhardy to assume that all the obstacles have been circumvented.

I also welcome the fact that, in the years since I last spoke in a debate such as this, the multi-partisan policy approach has continued. It is multi-partisan not just because of my party but, in particular, because of the multiplicity of Northern Ireland parties that are represented in the House.

The hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) is known—rightly; I emphasise that—both for her skill as a politician and for the cogency of her arguments on almost every occasion. With great respect to the hon. Lady, I must say that this has not been one of those occasions. I urge her to read the report of her speech with care; it was—I say this is a constructive spirit—a bit of a muddle.

The hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) told us in the clearest possible terms what we all knew: that the issue of Northern Ireland might determine the timing of the next general election, because his party's attitude might be crucial. I believe that it may also affect the result of the next election more than some anticipate: Northern Ireland is an important political issue, which affects not only the people of Northern Ireland but the people of the United Kingdom as a whole.

The policy must be right. I believe that the Labour party policy may be right, or very nearly right, although I do not want to argue about the details of Labour's policy on this occasion. The message must also be right, however. Let me say to the hon. Member for Redcar that I believe that the message from Labour in today's debate seems less multi-partisan than I think she wants it to be. In the interests of producing perhaps the best possible Government for this country, I urge the Labour party to ensure that the message is not muddled by the wish to reach a compromise with the views of those such as the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara). The hon. Gentleman spoke in the debate and, plainly, his views are not entirely in accord with those of the hon. Member for Redcar.

Mr. Maginnis: I should like to make it clear that the hon. and learned Member was expressing his own view and not mine when he alluded to me and mentioned the possibility of an election. I hope that he will acknowledge that, throughout the life of this Parliament, the Ulster Unionists have acted in the best interests of the United Kingdom in general and Northern Ireland in particular, and have not been guilty of any behind-backs dealing or dishonourable behaviour in terms of trying to help the peace process forward.

Mr. Carlile: I am happy to say that I make absolutely no suggestion of any underhand dealing by the hon. Gentleman and his party. I said that the hon. Gentleman was quite open in what he said. We can all take it from his speech that the timing of the next general election may be affected by the views of his party. If we were members of his party, we would take precisely that view, and no one can blame the hon. Gentleman for taking it.

Ms Mowlam: The Opposition's first priority is not the response of any minority Northern Ireland party, in terms of its size in the House. We put the peace process first and foremost. That is why, up to now, we have adopted a bipartisan approach to the framework document. I have not changed our position in a craven response to my hon. Friends, or to other parties, as the hon. and learned Gentleman suggests. I read the Bill in the hour that I was given to read it before we broke up for the Christmas recess, and we tabled a reasoned amendment. That was the basis of our response.

Mr. Carlile: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her intervention, but I emphasise that, if one does what many of us do every day, which is to read the important parts of the Order Paper, one sees a reasoned amendment that includes the words

"declines to give a Second Reading"

to the Bill. That is strange, because Labour's Front-Bench spokesman has told the House, "Well, we do not mind at all giving the Bill a Second Reading and we are relying on our reasoned amendment being defeated so that we can abstain on the substantive vote." The hon. Lady shakes her head, but that is the impression that she has given the House. *[Interruption.]* I am reminded that eventually she said that Labour would vote against Second Reading. The hon. Member for Redcar brought the word "dancing" to the debate. At an early stage, she appeared to be dancing on the head of a pin, but by the end of her speech it looked as if she was sitting on the pin. No doubt she will make her own judgment about Labour's position.

The nub of the issue is whether conditions in Northern Ireland are now such that the legal processes that apply in other parts of the United Kingdom will suffice. If the answer to that question is yes, we do not need the Bill. If the answer is no, we need the Bill or an amended version of it, and we should give it a Second Reading. There are three basic reasons for the answer to that question being no. Therefore, the Bill should be given a Second Reading.

The first reason is the often publicly stated political position of Sinn Fein. I speak simply of Sinn Fein as a political party, and I take it—perhaps foolishly for this purpose—at face value as a political party. It is quite clear that political Sinn Fein does not yet accept the renunciation of violence—nor does it renounce terrorism, which remains part of its political armoury. The second reason was given by the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone when he specified a terrifying list of weapons which I shall not repeat. The IRA is holding a terrible stockpile of hugely lethal weapons. Why are they being held by the IRA? That rhetorical question answers itself. The third reason that makes it inevitable that we support the continuation of a

[Mr. Carlile]

Bill of this broad kind, which is subject to the processes of the House, is the murders in recent weeks, which have been committed under the entirely bogus guise of a campaign against drugs.

Justice is generally depicted holding scales and blindfolded. As recent evidence has shown, the sort of justice that is meted out by the IRA is far from blindfold. It is very carefully targeted, and no justiciable issues are weighed in any scale. It is the sort of justice that equals the worst excesses of the Stalinist approach. That reason is as powerful as either of the other two for rejecting the view that we can do without emergency provisions at this time.

My right hon. and hon. Friends and I will support the Government and vote against Labour in the Lobby. However, that is not to say that we totally agree with the Government or with their approach. I share the view that was expressed by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North that it is highly regrettable that the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights, which was specifically assured by the Government that it would be consulted about any legislation of this sort, was not consulted. I do not understand why the Government had to present the legislation in such a hurry. Apparently they were in too much of a hurry to fulfil that promise to the commission.

I and my party are concerned, too, that the full-scale policy review that was promised in May 1995 was not brought into being until it was announced by the Secretary of State in the speech that opened this debate. A splendid chairman has been appointed to that body. Lord Lloyd of Berwick has a first-class legal mind and is extremely analytical. I am sure that he will produce an excellent report, but it would have been much better for that report to be available today rather than after Royal Assent to whatever Act emerges has been given.

I am concerned that the Government seem unprepared to amend the operation of the Diplock courts. Although it is some time ago, I took the trouble to go to Northern Ireland to watch the Diplock courts in operation, to sit with the judge and to get the flavour of what happens in those courts. I share the view expressed earlier, that the justice dispensed by those courts with a single judge is second to none. No criticism of the quality of that justice is possible.

As a lawyer, I think that Diplock courts have one great advantage over a jury court, in that, when the judge returns a verdict of guilty, he has to give reasons. It is awfully helpful to find out what those reasons are. That discipline should be applied to magistrates courts in England and Wales, where decisions are often made by judges effectively sitting alone, stipendiary magistrates in particular. Diplock courts have worked well and, above all, justly. I join the hon. Member for Redcar in paying tribute to the judges, who have done a sometimes fearful job in difficult conditions, with great courage and enormous objectivity. They are all too rarely mentioned in the roll of honour of Northern Ireland.

However, the time has not yet come to return to jury trials in all cases—it would not be realistic to do that now. We should not only widen the scope of jury trials, but make a gesture that would include having more than one judge in the Diplock court, to stage the return to normality and to send out a sign that we are returning to a form of justice that involves the sort of collegiate decision that ultimately occurs in a jury trial. It used to be said that there were not enough judges to do that—the Government have presented that argument—but that is not so now: there are enough judges because there are fewer Diplock trials. It could be achieved.

Similarly, I urge the Government to accept that there should be custody time limits for all persons who face remand for indictable offences. In addition, my party urges that police disciplinary procedures should be brought into line with those in England and Wales.

We welcome the rationale behind the introduction of silent video taping of interviews. That is progress, ostensibly at least, although it has taken a long time to get there: about two years. I share, however, some of the concerns and misgivings of the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone as to the way in which that might be abused.

As someone who over many years has practised in the criminal courts, both prosecuting and defending, I believe that the guarantee that one has in a court in England and Wales against tampering or against false accusations in relation to an audio-taped interview is the second soundtrack. I do not see how one can give such a guarantee in relation to a video-taped interview. It will be much easier not only to act as the hon. Gentleman suggested, but for people to play-act and to fake allegations of oral oppression.

I have reservations about the assertion that audio tapes cannot be made secure. Audio taping can be arranged in such a way—this has been shown to be the case by experience in England and Wales—that the interviewee soon acquires confidence in the interviewing procedure and forgets, if the room is suitably constructed, that audio taping is taking place. Nevertheless, I recognise that these are difficult issues and involve questions of judgment.

The Liberal Democrats have consistently urged the introduction of the European convention on human rights into United Kingdom law. Starting with Northern Ireland might be a good idea. It would certainly boost confidence in Northern Ireland. After all, the Government accept that, in any event, the standards contained in that convention and its terms must be applied in Northern Ireland. Why not introduce the convention there and make it enforceable in local courts?

Those are just some thoughts and some glosses that my party wants to put on the Bill. It is not perfect. It is capable of amendment, but we have the opportunity to amend it. It is in that spirit that I shall urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote with the Government tonight.

6.53 pm

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): I am delighted to follow the Liberal Democrats' spokesman, and I am happy to hear that he takes the position that his party has outlined, especially as that means taking a separate view from its sister party in Northern Ireland, the Alliance party, which today attacked the Government for this measure. I think that his position is much more understandable and will be much better understood by Northern Ireland's people.

The hon. and learned Gentleman and other hon. Members have rightly put their finger on the key issue that the House is considering: the necessity for the Bill.

The predecessor of this measure was introduced because of the dire emergency in Northern Ireland. It was clear that the normal processes could not cope with the circumstances with which they were faced. The House therefore thought it proper to introduce measures to take into account the emergency that arose because of terrorism in Northern Ireland.

We must consider whether circumstances have changed so much that the measure is no longer necessary. It is right that every one of us will be delighted that there has been a dramatic reduction in the number of killings and injuries of people in Northern Ireland, but it falls short of being peace. If one accepts the term "a peace process", by its very nature, that process may ultimately lead to peace but, at this stage, it is certainly not peace. Some of us believe that it is more of a tactical process for the Provisional IRA. We consider first its ceasefire statement, which says that it is not a permanent cessation of violence, but that is intended to be a complete cessation of military operations.

I remember that, for some weeks, perhaps months, everyone debated the difference between "complete" and "permanent". It was probably best put by the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney), who said that, while his car came to a complete standstill at traffic lights, it did not stay there permanently. Of course, the IRA retains the ability to start the violence again if it should so desire.

Over the past weeks and months, we have seen that the Provisional IRA has started that violence again. None of us is impressed that it uses the drugs issue as the excuse for removing from its community people whom it has a gripe against, and not because of drugs but because of many other issues in its community. We must therefore consider whether the present circumstances need an emergency provisions Bill.

The hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) dealt at some length with the Provisional IRA's weapons stockpile. Apart from that considerable stockpile, its representatives have made it abundantly clear that they have no intention of handing those weapons in. I am not sure whether an arms commission can sweet-talk the guns out of the Provisional IRA's hands. I doubt it very much, but the fact that, when we are taking a decision on the Bill, the IRA is saying that it has these guns and is not handing them over, leads everyone to believe that it has some future use for those weapons.

I feel uncomfortable with the fact that, in many other areas, the state has been prepared to dismantle its apparatus of defence of our community while the terrorist organisations still keep intact their apparatus to attack the community. Some months ago, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland told the House that the IRA was still recruiting, still developing new weapons, still fund-raising, still training and still targeting. No doubt he obtains his information from intelligence sources, and few of us will question it. If all of those things are going on in the paramilitary organisations, it is clear that the IRA is still capable of carrying out the same sort of heinous crimes that it has carried out for a generation. Those circumstances make our decision relatively easy.

I agree with the hon Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone that there is a distinction between the Provisional IRA's position and that of the loyalist paramilitary organisations. The first distinction appeared in their ceasefire statements. The Provisional IRA could not bring itself to end its violence permanently. The loyalist organisations were prepared to do so on condition that the Provisional IRA did so. The IRA could not bring itself to say there would be no further violence, but the loyalist organisations said that they would not start any violence provided that the Provisional IRA did not either.

Those loyalist organisations have not gone as far as anyone in the House would want, but they have moved further than the Provisional IRA, and they deserve whatever credit can possibly be given to such organisations. However, they still retain weapons that have killed in the past, and could kill in the future, innocent people in Northern Ireland. Those loyalist organisations must be included in the equation in the same way as the Provisional IRA.

The equipment exists to carry out and continue a terrorist campaign. There are almost daily threats from Sinn Fein leaders who tell us that the peace process is in danger and about to collapse, leaving everyone to conclude that that is the case and that the Provisional IRA intends to pick up its weapons and start placing its bombs once again. In those circumstances, there is only one decision that the House can take.

The events of the past weeks, including the many beatings that have taken place—the numbers have increased since before the ceasefire—and the recent killings, are all breaches of the ceasefire. We should not be reluctant to state that clearly. If the Provisional IRA's ceasefire requires its military operations to come to a complete standstill, sending its gunmen out to kill people—no matter which cause it claims as justification—is a breach of that ceasefire. Constitutional politicians should not pretend that those crimes are not taking place. We must establish clearly that the IRA's ceasefire is being breached; the Government are duty bound to deliver that message clearly and publicly.

I find it difficult to reach the same conclusion as the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone—that the arms commission has been given an impossible timetable. I believe that it has been given an impossible task, given that the Provisional IRA is not disposed to handing over its weapons. It would be helpful if, when replying to the debate, the Minister could state whether the arms commission has requested an extension of time, whether it faces difficulties because of the circumstances outlined earlier and whether, if the timetable were extended, it might be able to achieve a satisfactory outcome.

Those issues show that there is still a very real threat from the Provisional IRA and other terrorist organisations, so I reluctantly support the Government as they renew the legislation. I do not believe that any hon. Member would want the legislation to remain on the statute book for one minute longer than necessary. I shall join the Government in the Lobby tonight, and I hope that all other hon. Members will do so.

7.3 pm

Dr. Joe Hendron (Belfast, West): I oppose the Bill because I believe that the oppressive legislation that we have had for the past 25 years has been counter-productive and has helped paramilitary organisations. I pose two questions to the House. Have we a ceasefire? Have we a peace process? I shall answer those questions shortly.

[Dr. Joe Hendron]

A Protestant lady, Miss Margaret Wright, who was thought to be a Catholic, was brutally murdered shortly before the IRA and loyalist ceasefires. But I shall now tell the House of the recent murders committed by the Provisional IRA, most of which have occurred in the city of Belfast—some of the victims were either from, or had lived in, my constituency.

Mickey Mooney, aged 34, was murdered by the IRA on 20 April last year—before the ceasefire. Tony Kane, aged 29, was murdered by the IRA on 5 September last. He was shot dead as he sat behind the wheel of his car outside a Catholic church in west Belfast. Paul Devine was murdered by the IRA on 8 December and Francis Collins was also murdered by the IRA on 18 December.

Christopher Johnston, also known as Syd, was murdered by the IRA on 19 December. Martin McCrory was murdered at Turf Lodge in the heart of my constituency just after Christmas—on 27 December. He was shot as he watched television in his home with his three-year-old son beside him. Ian Lyons was murdered in Lurgan on 2 January as he sat with his girl friend in a car outside her parents' home.

How do I know that the IRA carried out those murders? There has been a fair bit of discussion on the subject. I have spoken to relatives of some of the victims, who are in no doubt that the Provos were responsible. My constituents in west Belfast have no doubt about the IRA's involvement.

I spoke to relatives of Paul Devine, who had spent 18 months in gaol and had been released just a few months before he was murdered. While he was in prison, a member of his family went to Sinn Fein's headquarters in Andersonstown, known as Connolly house, and told a senior Sinn Fein member that he believed that Paul was going to be shot by the IRA following his release from prison. He was obviously trying to ensure that that did not happen. Following his release, Paul was warned by the police that his life was in danger from the IRA—the rest is history.

The debate is about the emergency provisions Bill. Surely we have learnt something after 25 years of violence and civil strife. Powers of arrest and detention were often exercised, not to bring suspects before a court of justice to make them answer to a process of law, but to gather information and to invade, unjustifiably, the privacy of a person's life. Between 1978 and 1982, more than 22,000 people were arrested and interrogated—the vast majority were released without charge. Emergency legislation has been at the heart of Northern Ireland's legal structures since partition. Clearly, such a position is ultimately unsustainable, and surely the lesson is clear: a basis for political consensus must be found.

I shall vote against the Bill because the emergency provisions Acts have totally failed to provide an effective mechanism to defeat paramilitary organisations and because the power of internment would remain on the statute book. Reference has been made to the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights, chaired by a senior lawyer, Mr. Michael Lavery. That commission advises the Secretary of State on civil liberty issues and has said that it regrets the Government's decision to renew the emergency provisions Act in its entirety for another two years.

The commission placed great emphasis on the fact that powers of internment, non-jury Diplock courts and admissibility of confessions would remain in place. Mr. Michael Lavery QC, the chairman, has said that, with sustained peace for 16 months, a significant opportunity exists to enhance the protection of individuals' rights and civil liberties.

The Committee on the Administration of Justice, which has already been mentioned, is an independent, cross-community organisation, involved in working to protect civil liberties. It also opposed the renewal of the legislation and said that there was not a state of emergency at present.

I am aware of the comments of the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson). Like him, I am very conscious of the recent brutal murders in the city of Belfast, but the question is whether there is an emergency in the state of Northern Ireland at this point in time. I do not think so. But there is a peace process—granted it has been faltering a little recently—and therefore emergency legislation like this Bill is unhelpful. I have carefully studied the EPA review by Mr. John Rowe QC, who rightly emphasises that he plays no part in any peace process or negotiations, and that he is not bound by any Government policies.

The people of Ireland are divided by history. We therefore need political debate and meaningful dialogue—not draconian legislation. Over the years, members of the security forces who were involved in inevitable confrontation—I emphasise "inevitable" confrontation—with young people became recruiting sergeants for the IRA, the Ulster Defence Association, and the Ulster Volunteer Force. The situations surrounding the Birmingham Six and the Guildford Four arose from pressure exerted on the legal process to solve terrorist actions.

The father of Gerry Conlon, Giuseppe Conlon, who had been a patient of mine, was allowed to die in prison in England. Like his son, he was a totally innocent person. His widow Mrs. Sarah Conlon, who is my friend, has never received an apology from the British Government. Even after all these years, compensation for Gerry and his mother is yet to be finalised. I would greatly appreciate it if the Minister took that matter up with the Home Secretary. Quite a number of years have now passed and it is immoral that compensation for Gerry Conlon and Mrs. Sarah Conlon—who lives in the heart of my constituency and is one of the loveliest people I have ever met—has not been finalised. I cannot speak for the Birmingham Six or other members of the Guildford Four.

In theory, the law may be the same for civilians and members of the security forces, but in practice it is quite different. Both Private Ian Thain and Private Lee Clegg were found guilty of murder, but each was released after about two years in prison. In contrast, Patrick Kane, Michael Timmons and Sean Kelly, who did not murder anyone, were sentenced to life imprisonment.

The three unarmed IRA members who were slaughtered in Gibraltar in March 1988 could easily have been arrested. As we know, they had been followed for some days. Like many others, I was shocked by the speech made by the Secretary of State for Defence at the Tory party conference some months ago when he glorified the exploits and disposition of the SAS.

I return to the point with which I started. The IRA's ceasefire is only partial. It no longer shoots members of security forces, but it seems to be all right to murder members of the nationalist community.

I spent 30 years as a medical practitioner in west Belfast and for 20 years I have been an elected politician. I know many of the people there, so I can speak with some authority on the matter. Why has the IRA murdered the young men to whom I have referred? It is nothing to do with drugs. The Provos want to reassert their power base in nationalist housing estates. They greatly fear normality. Indeed, it is what they fear most. They are not worried about the legislation going through the House today—it is normality they fear. Above all, they want to discredit the police: in fact, they want to be the police—those who deal with law and order in the area.

Repressive legislation has indirectly led to many young people from both communities getting involved with paramilitaries. The republican leadership must put an end to murder, assault and intimidation. Those leaders have no right to order young people or their parents to report to the local Sinn Fein office. That happens virtually every day of the week in west Belfast, and I cannot see how the Bill will do anything about it. Every day somebody has to report to a Sinn Fein office, yet they say that they have nothing to do with the IRA. If the republican leadership want to be treated as democrats, they must respect democracy.

Part of the background to the debate concerns the peace process and the twin-track process; it is all intertwined. That twin-track process launched by the two Prime Ministers must remain Government policy. In recent correspondence that I have had with the Prime Minister, he has once again referred to the end of February as the agreed time for all-party negotiations.

Reference has been made to Senator George Mitchell and his colleagues, who have an important job to do. The hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) has described it as a mission impossible. Certainly, what the Provos have been up to recently makes the task of Senator Mitchell and his colleagues very difficult. Like others, I am sure that, if Senator Mitchell and his colleagues requested a few more weeks in which to produce their report, both Governments would agree. I made a short submission to Senator Mitchell and his colleagues that I hope will be helpful.

All parties, including Sinn Fein, must be involved in continuing dialogue. The people of Northern Ireland will never forgive us if we do not sustain the peace process. The agenda for all-party talks should continue to include the three main relationships—those between the two communities in the north, between the north and the south, and of course between Britain and Ireland. Let us not play into the hands of those who want to destroy the peace process. We must be responsible in our words, actions and legislation.

The police in Northern Ireland have had an impossible task over the past 25 years. Policing in a community divided by history is not easy. The direct association of the police force with repressive legislation has made total acceptability in the nationalist community impossible. I say that as somebody who has co-operated with the police on virtually a daily basis for many years. I have nothing but respect for the great majority of them.

It is a fact of life, however, that on the nationalist housing estates of Belfast, and indeed in the nationalist communities right across the north of Ireland, people of course co-operate with the police on a day-to-day basis but have difficulties in accepting them. Although that subject is for another day, I add that the problem is to do with the police having identified with one section of the community. I appreciate that there have been improvements in recent times, but there is a major debate going on concerning that subject. Solutions concerning politics and security are inextricably linked.

The long-suffering people of my city—on the Falls road and the Shankill road—want peace. The people of Northern Ireland want peace. All parties must therefore be involved in dialogue, and huffing and puffing will not solve anything. Recently, President Clinton visited Northern Ireland. He visited both communities and made a very big impact. His message was one of peace and support for the peace process. As I said, I shall oppose the Bill, because I believe that such legislation is counter-productive.

A young Belfast student recently gave vivid expression to what I hope will be our shared vision for the future when he wrote:

"In morning sunlight over Belfast a fragile ray of hope grows bright".

7.17 pm

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): I pay tribute to the important words of both my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) and the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron), who represent the different communities and the different sides of Belfast. It seems that many of the powerful comments by the hon. Member for Belfast, West are an argument for the renewal of the emergency provisions powers. With his great knowledge of the west Belfast community, the very fact that he speaks about the recent murders as being undoubtedly the work of the Provisional IRA is itself a powerful argument for saying that normality is very far from having been restored to the streets and the estates of Belfast.

Although I was very impressed by the extent to which there appeared to be normality in the centres of Belfast and Londonderry when I last visited the Province during the summer, I feel that the recent sad, tragic and brutal murders are cracks in the peace process, which show once again the importance of renewing the powers.

In addition to the arguments adduced by the hon. Member for Belfast, East in his powerful and effective speech, other important issues need to be considered by the House. The Labour Front-Bench spokesmen find themselves in an extraordinary position. They have tabled a reasoned amendment to the motion when their leadership has suggested that the party is now tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime.

Here we have the most important powers against terrorism, which is the most serious of crimes. One might think that in the spirit of the new Labour party there might be a return to the bipartisanship that was so welcome on Northern Ireland matters. Far from it. The Labour party says that it intends to vote against the Second Reading of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill. Opposition spokesmen have searched desperately through the Bill to find some excuse for voting against it. That is opposition for opposition's sake.

[Mr. Nick Hawkins]

I want the Opposition to return to the old days of bipartisanship in Northern Ireland. Unless and until they support the Government on every piece of anti-terrorist legislation, the voters of Britain will never take seriously any of the weasel words of Labour spokesmen from the leader downwards on the strength of the Labour party's policy on crime. If the Opposition will not support us on measures against terrorism, they cannot be taken seriously. It is a measure of the desperation of their opposition for opposition's sake that the Opposition intend to vote against these important and crucial powers tonight.

When we consider the importance of the powers contained in the Bill, we can see clearly, especially in view of the recent murders by the IRA masquerading as Direct Action Against Drugs, that it would be premature to remove the emergency legislation while the terrorist organisations are intact and their weapons are available to return to violence.

No one prays more fervently than I for a complete and lasting peace in Northern Ireland. I admit that, when the peace process began, I was extremely cynical about its prospects. I was delighted that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland embarked on it and worked on the twin-track process with the leadership of the Irish Republic. I am delighted that the peace process has gone as far as it has.

However, the terrorist organisations still have their arsenals of weapons. Terrorist murders are still committed by Provisional IRA, as the hon. Member for Belfast, West clearly described, as did the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) in a powerful speech on security matters on behalf of the Ulster Unionists.

The case is undoubtedly made for further renewal of the emergency powers, even if the Government have rightly said that, as soon as the security situation permits, the Government may ask Parliament to suspend individual provisions of the Act or to introduce them in a lapsed form. With terrorist murders happening, sadly, regularly in the past few weeks, it is clear that we cannot yet suspend the emergency provisions. Although we welcome the fact that terrorism has declined markedly since September 1994, when the ceasefire was announced, continuing murders highlight the need for special security measures in the Province.

Labour Front-Bench spokesmen say in their reasoned amendment that one of the reasons they propose to vote against the Second Reading of the Bill relates to the recommendations of Mr. John Rowe QC in his analysis of the security situation. I was proud to serve with Mr. Rowe on the Bar Council for several years and I served under his chairmanship. I know what a superb lawyer he is and what a careful analysis he has made, but it must be for Her Majesty's Government to decide what is in the best interests of the security and the legal situation. They have clearly considered carefully the implications of the security situation. There is no doubt in my mind that their analysis is right.

Several hon. Members who have spoken this evening, not least the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, have made it clear why that is. The changes that have been made to security procedures have been implemented solely on the professional advice of the Chief Constable and the General Officer Commanding. The Government are right to say that they cannot and will not take unnecessary risks with people's lives.

I am sick to the back teeth of hearing spokesmen for Sinn Fein day after day and night after night on the radio and television speaking weasel words to excuse terrorist actions and the actions of the IRA. They have refused to contemplate the surrender of their weapons and the renunciation of violence. They come up with all sorts of weasel words to excuse terrorism. While they do so, they will not be taken seriously as part of the peace process. They do not deserve to be treated as democratic politicians. I have no doubt that my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench are right to continue to state powerfully than Sinn Fein and the IRA and all their works cannot be treated with respect as democratic politicians until the weapons are surrendered and we have a real ceasefire.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was right last Sunday when he said what he would say to Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness and others:

> "I believe you can stop these killings and these beatings and if you wish to be taken seriously as democratic politicians, now or in the future, then you should stop these killings and these beatings and you should stop them now and for good."

Those were powerful words, which I hope and pray will be taken seriously. Until the spokesmen for Sinn Fein and the leaders of the IRA surrender their arms for good, they cannot be taken seriously, and the peace process will continue to be in serious jeopardy, despite the bravery and success of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's initiative.

As for the future, the Government have rightly emphasised that nothing will be implemented in Northern Ireland without the consent of all the parties in talks, without the consent of the people in a referendum or without the consent of Parliament. That is the triple lock. There is a powerful community in my constituency that emanates from Northern Ireland. It comprises people of both faiths and both communities. It is important not only to all the peace-loving people of Northern Ireland but to all the people of the United Kingdom that the triple lock should continue to be in place. I know that it is a particular reassurance to the Unionist community in my constituency, with whom I have always had good and close links.

Before I conclude, I should touch briefly on what I see as the way forward and what I know my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench see as the way forward. The reaction in the Province to President Clinton's visit and to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's visits last year clearly illustrated the hope that exists there. I saw that for myself in Northern Ireland last summer. I saw a community which had hungered for peace enjoying after so many years the fruits of peace.

Mr. Maginnis: *indicated assent.*

Mr. Hawkins: I am delighted to see the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone nodding at those words.

The preparatory talks are intended to give fresh momentum to the peace process, but the murders in the Province by the terrorists masquerading under the false title of Direct Action Against Drugs highlight the need for

all parties in the Province to demonstrate beyond doubt that they are committed exclusively to peaceful means, not least by making progress on decommissioning.

I apologise to the hon. Members who are to reply to the debate that I may not be able to be in the Chamber for all the closing speeches, although I hope to hear almost all of them. I am delighted to have had an opportunity to speak briefly in this important debate. I hope that the Labour party will eventually learn not to oppose the Government on important anti-terrorist measures.

7.28 pm

Mr. Robert McCartney (North Down): The issue before the House is whether the Bill, which would in large measure re-enact the principal provisions of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991, should receive a Second Reading in what are alleged to be changed circumstances.

I should mention to the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam), who unfortunately is not here at present, that, as perhaps the only independent Member in the Chamber, I cast my vote either in support of the Government or in opposition to them as my conscience dictates on the issues before the House at the time. While I am ideologically totally in favour of the socio-economic policies of the Opposition—with whom I have voted as a volunteer, and not as a whipped or pressed man, on every occasion since I entered the House—I shall with little hesitation be voting with the Government this evening.

The central principle in this debate is the extent to which the protection of the lives, personal safety and property of British citizens—particularly those living in Northern Ireland—requires laws that depart in some measure from traditional civil liberties and human rights. It can be argued that the granting of exceptional powers and the diminution of certain rights, such as trial by jury or access to legal advice, ought to be maintained only as long as the threat of terrorism in all its forms justifies it. Without doubt, that is the present case in Northern Ireland.

The existing ceasefire has been described by the accountable Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office as a military ceasefire, which will be broken only by bombs on the mainland or by attacks on security personnel. While that fine distinction may serve the political objectives of the Government, it offers small comfort to the friends and relatives of those civilians—at present drawn almost entirely from the ghettos of the minority community—who are being mutilated with baseball bats, clubs, staves and iron bars, and murdered almost on a daily basis.

Such people—like the rest of Northern Ireland's citizens—were sold the peace process on the basis of a permanent cessation of terrorist violence. In neither the Downing street declaration nor Government statements at the time of the announcement of the framework document do I recollect any distinction being drawn between military ceasefires and a cessation of violence such as would offer ordinary civilians the protection of normal times.

On the one hand, the frankness of the Minister's language is to be admired, since it reveals what many in Northern Ireland have always believed to be the case: that the peace process, to use that rather nebulous term, was only in a subsidiary way about the ending or cessation of political violence in Northern Ireland, and that its essential purpose was the protection of mainland British economic and political interests.

Northern Ireland has always been a part of the United Kingdom where, to echo the words of the late Reginald Maudling, a level of violence was acceptable to the British Government that would have been totally unacceptable in any other part of the United Kingdom. The most effective methods of protecting the lives and property of the British citizens of Northern Ireland have always been made subordinate to the political objectives of successive British Governments.

The terrorists have always been nurtured and encouraged by the knowledge that their objective—removing Northern Ireland from the United Kingdom—was one upon which successive British Administrations were largely neutral. Concessions could always be wrung from those Administrations at the expense of the pro-Union community. A great number of pro-Union people, like the Czechs in 1938, have rightly suspected that England's peace might be bought at their expense.

This debate between the Government and the Opposition resembles nothing so much as the debate between the Lilliputians and the Blefuscans as to which end of the egg they should open. The only item of any substance in the Opposition amendment relates to the Government's failure to implement the recommendations of Mr. John Rowe's review by removing internment without trial from the statute book. For the ordinary people of Northern Ireland, that is a dispute without substance. Internment has been on the statute book for 20 years without its use being invoked. If the past is any guide to the future political courage of those charged with government, it could remain on the statute book into eternity without being made operative.

What, one may ask, is all the hullabaloo about? The Republic of Ireland has had legislation allowing detention in specified circumstances since 1940, with far less justification than has been and is now being offered in Northern Ireland. I detect no protests from those who speak loudly about the very presence on the statute book of a non-invoked form of detention principle in the United Kingdom relative to Northern Ireland about the same legislation being on the statute book in the Republic of Ireland.

In what other part of the United Kingdom would the Government have tolerated murder, mayhem and the destruction of property on the levels seen in Northern Ireland without not only having detention legislation on the statute book, but actually putting it into effect? Does anyone in the House seriously believe that, if the murder and assassination of judges, members of the public and innocent people had been taking place in Yorkshire, Cornwall or Kent at the level that we have seen in Northern Ireland, there would not have been an all-party bipartisan approach for the implementation of detention procedures in order to stop it?

The assistant Chief Constable of Northern Ireland recently went on the record to state that, on the basis of high-grade intelligence, the police were aware of the identity of the specific killers involved in 80 per cent. of the 1,800 unsolved murders in Northern Ireland. In the other 20 per cent., the police were aware of a small group—perhaps numbering two or three persons—who

[Mr. Robert McCartney]

were specifically involved in those killings. Those people cannot be brought to justice in accordance with the normal rules and principles of law pertaining in a stable and normal society. They are murderous and homicidal people who are exempt from punishment because of the terror that they can inspire and the punishment that they can inflict upon those who have the courage to give evidence against them.

Let me give the House some scenarios typical of Northern Ireland. Mr. X lives in a nationalist housing estate. He is married, with a number of teenage children and—perhaps within that same estate—he has an extended family of cousins, uncles and aunts. He is an eye-witness to a murder perpetrated by someone he knows and recognises as a person with paramilitary convictions. That person may be so confident of the terror that his organisation inspires that he may not even disguise himself by wearing a mask. The witness informs the police, who arrest the perpetrator; he resists all questioning and is released. The witness refuses to testify out of fear for himself and his family. Without his evidence, the killer goes free to kill again. That is not an anecdotal account; it is a matter that is known to the security authorities.

In the mid-1970s, I had occasion to prosecute four or five men on murder charges. All of them had a peripheral involvement. All of them had made statements, which they subsequently withdrew, identifying the person who pulled the trigger. The statements were not admissible because they had been made by accomplices. The trigger man was arrested and was subjected to interrogation, but because he was a hard case who had probably been well schooled in anti-interrogation procedures, he sat in Castlereagh for seven days and never uttered a word. He was released, and he was again involved in serious terrorist crime. He was imprisoned, released and subsequently murdered by his own kind. That is typical of what happens in many cases in Northern Ireland, and it may be one of the 1,800 unsolved murder cases in which the security authorities are firmly aware of the identity of those involved.

Only too frequently, it is those who are peripherally involved, who are often young and inexperienced people who have acted as look-outs and who have collected information, but who are technically guilty of murder, who are convicted and who go to prison under a life sentence. They are the sort of people who perhaps ought to be released in some form of remission because they were by no means central to the horrible crimes that were committed. But in many cases, those who actually commit the murder—the hitmen, the godfathers—are beyond the law. They are certainly beyond the law that is on the statute book at present.

I have practised law in Northern Ireland for more than 30 years, for 20 of them as a Queen's Counsel. I am dedicated to the principles of the common law for the protection of the individual against the power of the state. Like almost every other hon. Member who has spoken in or been present during this debate, I passionately look forward to the day when it is unnecessary for legislation such as the Bill to be on the statute book. However, one must face the reality that there is a point when judgment must be made about how far the ordinary laws must necessarily be put aside to protect the state and the overwhelming majority of its law-abiding citizens from an organised, violent and murderous conspiracy that would subvert the principles of justice and order that make democratic government possible.

It is a measure of the impasse that we have reached that the central core of this debate is not whether a measure to secure the removal from society of such violent criminals should be invoked, but whether, uninvoked and unlikely to be invoked, it should even remain on the statute book. That is the core of the Opposition's objection. The measure has been on the statute book for 20 years. It has been held in refrigerated if not cold storage against the day when it may be required to be used, but it is not in operation. One fears that the unreality that surrounds the debate is taken by the vast, law-abiding majority of both communities in Northern Ireland as a measure of the House's understanding of the true nature of their situation.

In pursuit of the holy grail of an unattainable political situation, the squaring of an impossible political circle that will guarantee the security of the British mainland, the Government, with the bipartisan support of the Opposition, are grappling with the forms instead of dealing with the substance of the problem. To abandon democratic principle in favour of short-term expediency is but to court ultimate disaster. There could not be a less opportune time to remove the detention provision from the statute book. I do not hear people advocating its being put into operation, and I am aware of the political considerations that would have to be taken into account before such a step was taken. But to remove the detention provision from the statute book at present would offer all the wrong signals to the men of terror.

There must come a time when the murder of civilians can no longer be ignored, even if it be the murder of alleged, and certainly unproven, drug dealers. The IRA has, in this case, created a class of psychological outlaw. No longer is it the position—it has not been for centuries—that a man may be outlawed, that every man's hand may be turned against him and that he will be beyond the protection of the law, but the IRA is attempting to use what many people instinctively, intuitively and psychologically feel about those who dabble in drugs and to make such people targets who, the average person would say, psychologically at least, should be afforded no protection.

That is, of course, a fraud and a farce. It is only a pretext on which the IRA can dominate, terrorise and intimidate substantial and significant areas in Belfast, where it can pretend that the RUC and other law enforcement agencies are not welcome. Those are areas in which the IRA can arrogate to itself the power of the state, which it can enforce by utilising the sanction of arms and violence which, in any democratic society, should be used only by the state in accordance with laws approved by its democratic and elected Government.

There can be no place in any peace process for a separate government of people who allege that they are entitled to bear arms. The whole idea that the IRA should not surrender its arms is political. To surrender even one rusty pistol would be to acknowledge that that pistol is held unlawfully and that the weapons held by the forces of the state are lawfully held by them to enforce such sanctions as the lawful Government may grant.

The IRA will not willingly, to use its own terms, either by the back door or by the front door, surrender what affords it its only negotiating power. Why can the British Government, in the form of their personnel in the Northern Ireland Office, be seen entertaining these people in discussions? I speak not only about the IRA, but about all the paramilitary figures who have no political mandate, but who have the power of the gun and the bomb. Would they be entertained if they did not have those weapons? The answer is no. With a mandate of 10 per cent., they would be treated—I do not mean this at all disparagingly—in exactly the same way as the Alliance party in Northern Ireland is.

In fact, as I am sure that the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron) would agree—I hope that the Minister responsible for security in Northern Ireland will take this into account—the mandate would not even be from 10 per cent. of the population were it not for the massive impersonation, fraud and other unlawful practices that are engaged in by Sinn Fein in every election, and especially in the constituency of Belfast, West. Those people must be made aware that, if they escalate the present level of violence and return to the use of guns and bombs as a method of achieving political returns, there is some ultimate position that the established Government can rely upon to meet that challenge. That may well be the presence on the statute book of a power to detain those who are known to be involved.

It has been mentioned during the debate that democratic Governments all over the world, from time to time, are faced with extraordinary situations where only unusual and exceptional powers are appropriate to answer a challenge. President Clinton visited us before Christmas and gave many people in Northern Ireland a lot of hope, but I remind the House that two Presidents of the United States of America—President Abraham Lincoln, during the war between the states, and President Roosevelt during the second world war—were forced to take steps that doubtless would have incurred the criticism of those on the Opposition Front Bench.

President Lincoln suspended habeas corpus, executed prisoners without trial and interfered with the United States mail to such an extent that Chief Justice Taney wrote complaining about those measures. However, the late Mr. Justice Robert Jackson, a distinguished member of the American Supreme Court and the representative of the United States Government at the Nuremberg trials, stated that he was by no means certain that democracy would have survived if President Lincoln had accepted Mr. Justice Taney's criticisms.

More recently, when the United States felt that it was threatened on its western seaboard after the Japanese attack on Pearl harbour, 100,000 nisei, or Japanese, many of whom were American citizens, were interned in 10 camps because it was believed that, in the greater interests of the defence of the United States, it was necessary to protect the state. One could hardly accuse Lincoln or Franklin Delano Roosevelt of being fascists, but we have to bring to the debate a sense of reality.

I do not ask or suggest that the internment provisions should be invoked, but, at a time when the IRA is beginning to escalate its violence to a point where even the Government will have to accept that the ceasefire is at an end, it would be quite wrong to send it the message that the ultimate deterrent that it fears is being not only uninvoked but removed from this legislation. I suggest that all hon. Members who believe in the preservation of democracy and accept, in the face of escalating violence, that it is necessary to have some such proposals, should follow the Government through the Lobby this evening.

7.54 pm

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): I listened carefully to what the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) said about voting according to his conscience. I have spoken consistently and voted conscientiously against such oppressive measures over a considerable period because I honestly believe that such legislation does little, if anything, to defeat terrorism. It might even be counter-productive, by alienating some sections of the community from the forces of law and order. Nothing in recent experience has convinced me to change my mind. Even before the ceasefire, I voted consistently against such emergency provisions and I believe that the case for voting against them is even stronger now that the ceasefire has been, thankfully, in operation for more than 16 months.

I realise that the explanatory and financial memorandum states that the Bill takes account of the developments since the paramilitary ceasefires, and supporters of the Bill might argue that it is not as bad as its predecessors. Nevertheless, on looking through the Bill, any reasonable hon. Member would have to admit that it contains some draconian measures and does not even incorporate the modest recommendations of Mr. John Rowe QC. Internment without trial is still on the statute book. The Diplock courts remain, and the police and the armed forces will still have draconian powers of search, arrest and detention which should be anathema to any civilised democracy.

I am amazed to hear that the Liberal Democrats will vote with the Government. I always thought the Liberal Democrats had, at least some respect for civil rights, yet even that seems to have evaporated, judging from what the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) said.

I realise that we cannot afford to be complacent about the continuation of the ceasefire. We can see that that is true from recent events, such as the recent convictions in the High Court in Scotland of loyalist paramilitaries involved in attempted arms smuggling to Northern Ireland. The fact that they were successfully caught and convicted had nothing whatsoever to do with the Northern Ireland emergency provisions legislation, because such legislation does not apply to Scotland. The convictions came about because of good detective work, especially by the Central Scotland police force. I pay tribute to them for their hard work.

Reference has been made by several speakers to the murders in Northern Ireland over the Christmas and new year period. There is widespread concern in Northern Ireland and elsewhere about them. I absolutely deplore such killings. Whatever the victims have done, or are alleged to have done, no person or group of persons has a right to set themselves up as judge, jury and executioner. However, it would be unwise to interpret those tragic deaths as an end to the ceasefire and a justification for abandoning the peace process. Most, if not all, of the

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recent murders would be appear to be drugs-related rather than sectarian or politically motivated. That is not in any way to condone them, but we should not allow ourselves to be swayed from the peace process. I fail to see how the Bill will help to trace and convict those responsible for such heinous crimes.

Part of the problem in certain communities in Northern Ireland is the lack of trust between the communities and the police. I urge the Government to take seriously the need for police reform, so that the police become truly representative of, and accountable to, the communities that they serve. That would prove far more effective than this legislation in the campaign against crime—whether it be drug trafficking, terrorism, punishment beating or any other criminal activity.

I urge the Government not to be deflected from the peace process and to pursue the twin-track approach vigorously. I appeal to all parties to support and to co-operate with Senator Mitchell's commission. The Government should set a date for the commencement of meaningful all-party talks. That would be a much more constructive approach than passing more oppressive legislation such as the Bill, which is a gross and unjustifiable infringement of the civil liberties of the people of Northern Ireland and could have a negative impact on the peace process.

7.59 pm

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): I approach the situation by judging the Government's attitudes, behaviour and track record. I have said before that I am concerned about the almost complete lack of recognition by Government Front Benchers of the co-operation and bipartisan support of Opposition Front Benchers. Conservative Members may dispute it all they like, but the general election is first and foremost in their minds. I believe that we must watch them like hawks to ensure that they do not use the Northern Ireland issue to their party political advantage.

I accept that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has a reasonably good record of not using the issue for party political purposes. However, as we approach the general election, he will be subject to the same pressures from his Prime Minister and his party as any other Secretary of State. Our suspicions are reinforced by the way in which the Bill was introduced. Opposition Front Benchers were not able to consider it properly, and there was no consultation. If the Labour party's bipartisan approach to the issue had been appreciated by the Government, there would have been full consultation with the House about the Northern Ireland situation. I am concerned about the Government's real intentions in introducing the legislation.

The parliamentary arithmetic must also be a factor in the Government's mind—not only this year but as we approach the general election. As soon as potential difficulties arose for the Government with the death of a sitting Conservative Member, the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis)—he has been present in the Chamber for the entire debate but has now left temporarily—issued a vote of confidence in the Government, seemingly without the authorisation of his leader. He assured them that the Ulster Unionist party was right behind them.

The hon. Gentleman has criticised the tactics of the Labour party, but his leadership quickly recognised his bad tactics in giving the Government a blank cheque. The right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) quickly announced publicly that the Ulster Unionist party would give no blank cheques to the Government and that any support for them would be determined according to the best interests of Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom.

Many Labour Members suspect that the Government will use the Northern Ireland issue for party political purposes. Opposition Front Benchers have an excellent record of clear-cut support for the Government. My hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) today reiterated Labour's support for the Government's Northern Ireland initiative, and I believe that that co-operation and support should be valued properly.

I accept the rationale advanced by my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan), who has consistently expressed reservations about this type of legislation. In supporting my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar, I believe that we must move forward from our present position. It is a pointless and a futile exercise to consider what may or may not have happened in different circumstances. We should not say, "If such and such had happened at a particular time, we would not be here now." We are in this position, and we must do the best possible job in the current circumstances.

I accept that events are see-sawing, but Labour Front Benchers are moving positively to make the best of a situation that is not ideal. We will not change things overnight, but we must send signals that we are willing to move away from the present mindset about this type of emergency legislation. That is the difference between the Opposition and the Government. No doubt we will make mistakes; we will get things wrong here and there. However, the Labour party is trying to create an atmosphere of change and to maintain the momentum of the peace process. Although I understand the reservations expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West, I believe that Opposition Front Benchers must move forward from the present position.

Like my hon. Friend, I am absolutely astonished by the attitude adopted by the Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), who unfortunately is not in the Chamber. His attitude clearly reflected the criticism levelled by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara). He described the make-up of the Committee that considered the original legislation, which he said was a lawyers' delight. The Committee must have been bored to death by all the clauses, subsections and legal jargon in it.

The Liberal Democrat spokesman demonstrated the capacity of the legal profession—I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar referred to them as the "fraternity"—to discuss matters among themselves, assuming that they are better trained and a wee bit more intelligent than the rest of us. They believe that they are better able to deal with such matters and that we are simply nuisances.

It is generally accepted—I do not agree with it myself—that the Liberal Democrats have a long tradition of support for civil liberties. However, the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery supported Diplock

courts and, in fact, he advocated their extension to the rest of the United Kingdom. He went on to say that the Liberals would support the Government tonight.

I received a letter from the local branch of the Liberal party in my constituency which I have kept for quite a while. In the letter, the Liberals demand that I take each and every opportunity to vote against the Government to bring them down, as it is the duty of all non-Tory Members of Parliament to bring down the Government. I wrote back to the Liberals asking, "Should we play party politics over Northern Ireland and bring down the Government, even though we think that they are right?" The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery has put the opposite view tonight. That proves once again the variable behaviour of the Liberal Party, and I think that it stinks.

The Liberal Democrats' sister party in Northern Ireland is the Alliance party. I shall be extreme and say that I do not have any time for the Conservative party. However, I accept that it is consistent: it represents its supporters and a particular class interest quite strongly. I do not like it, but I accept it. I think that Conservative Members will agree that the Liberal Democrats are all things to all people everywhere. Therefore, I have absolutely no respect for the Liberal Democrat position tonight.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) was quite scathing about the Labour party's position on internment. Internment is not acceptable. It is said that it involves only a small point of principle, that it is in cold storage and that it was never intended to be used. If it has existed for 21 years or longer without ever being used, why should it remain? Its existence sends out all sorts of signals about 1971 which reverberate through the nationalist communities in Northern Ireland.

The Irish immigrant communities in the United Kingdom use the issue as a stick with which to beat the United Kingdom and its reputation on civil liberties. A line in the nationalist song "The Men Behind the Wire" goes:

"Cromwell's men are here again".

That relates directly to the United Kingdom's policy of internment in Northern Ireland, which has caused great problems. The continuation of that policy on the statute book causes more problems than it is worth. It is a stain on our record as a democratic society, and we should get rid of it.

It is an understatement to say that it is not easy to deal with the situation in Northern Ireland. Its affairs must be handled carefully, and we must conduct ourselves responsibly. With this legislation, however, there have been delays and a lack of consultation, which suggests to me that the Government are dancing to the tune of their hardliners, to keep them on side in parliamentary votes. In doing so, they are pandering to all sorts of prejudices and hardline positions. The Government have been doing this for quite a while and are now well on the road to decay, which is less than this country deserves.

I hope I am not doing my Unionist friends an injustice when I say that it seems to me that where they are is where they are going to stay: there will be no movement of any kind. I am fortunate enough to be on the mailing list of the Ulster Unionist party; some of the papers I am sent show considerable movement by some of the party's members, but that is not reflected by their parliamentary representatives. I know that we all have to account for ourselves to our constituents back home, but I do not think sometimes that enough attention is paid to how we arrived at this predicament in the first place.

I do not want to go down memory lane this evening—this is not the time to do so—but most of us here do know why we are where we are in Northern Ireland. The Unionists perhaps do not recognise sufficiently the fears and doubts of the other section of society in Northern Ireland, The Unionist community is dominant there—I do not use the word maliciously—and is undoubtedly the stronger of the two communities. I repeat, therefore, that there does not seem to be enough willingness on the part of Unionist representatives in this Chamber to move forward.

I do not live in Northern Ireland; I have never lived in a society where a person can be killed at a moment's notice for his political or religious beliefs or because he happens to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. I fully recognise the pressures that have been brought to bear in Northern Ireland for the past 25 years, but the Unionist community needs to remember that it is not just a question of the past 25 years—it is also important to remember how the problems began and to think about where we are heading in the future.

I think it daft to authorise only silent video recordings, although the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone made one or two worthwhile points about the operational difficulties. I think that silent videos will make Britain once again a laughing stock, just as we were when the spokesmen for the paramilitary organisations were not allowed to speak on television. That just made us look stupid, and we were ridiculed throughout the world. To their credit, the Government eventually got off that hook. Silent videos would be disastrous, and would not help at all.

Clause 51 is a good example of the Government's clumsiness—some would say deviousness—in sending out the wrong signals. Under current legislation, the appointment of an independent assessor of military complaints procedures is mandatory; as I understand it, however, the Bill will make it discretionary. If there are such good reasons for holding fast to the status quo, why meddle with the appointment of this person? I should like to hear the Government's view.

In the context of Northern Ireland, we all have a duty to behave responsibly. I fully support the Labour Front-Bench position, which is to support the Government for as long as the Government are clearly acting in the interests both of the people of Northern Ireland and of the rest of the United Kingdom. At the first signs of the Government trying to turn the issue to their party advantage—there are already such signs on the horizon—the trouble will start. There is no uglier sight than that of a Conservative Government clinging to power by their fingernails. History will judge them harshly if they try to use this issue for political ends.

8.15 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): I respect what the hon. Members for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) and for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy), who share a passionate desire for peace in Northern Ireland, said, but it was the extraordinarily lucid speech by the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney), a

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great deal of which I agreed with, which has prompted me to speak briefly in this debate. For all its lucidity and polish, his speech had a distinctively Northern Ireland flavour.

The hon. and learned Gentleman implied, in passing, that the United Kingdom Government lacked a full commitment to Northern Ireland; at least, he suggested that that commitment was not as great as he would like. Drawing on my experience as the Minister responsible for economic affairs in Northern Ireland for three years, I think it unfair not to give the Government proper respect for the totality of their commitment.

I offer as an example the fact that the Department of Economic Development, for which I was responsible, had a budget of £500 million a year, compared with the £1.3 billion at the disposal of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for the whole of Great Britain. The population of Northern Ireland, small though it may be, thus enjoyed a budget almost one third as much as the one for the rest of the United Kingdom. That enabled us to put in place some dramatic initiatives to win jobs for Northern Ireland and to bring about the prosperity which, with the peace process, has now led to a 5.6 per cent. increase in employment. Property prices and all the other economic indicators are now working their way through very well indeed. All this is a sign of the great commitment of the United Kingdom Government to Northern Ireland.

Similarly, there has been a firm military commitment to the Province for many years. Anyone who doubts the Government's commitment doubts, in effect, the dedication of the troops who have served so courageously in Northern Ireland over the years. Their courage and determination are unflinching in the face of a great deal of aggression and murder, and they deserve higher tributes than they are sometimes paid.

Those who urge tougher measures against terrorism in Northern Ireland have my support, in the sense that I understand why they make their demands. Nothing could be more galling than knowing that there are identifiable people in Northern Ireland who have been responsible for atrocities. We have to ensure that the rule of law is applied, and seen to be applied, in Northern Ireland. If I learned one thing during my three years there as a Minister, it was the crucial importance of winning the international war to make people understand the difficulties of the situation in Northern Ireland.

Anyone who visits the United States will recognise that the depth of ignorance in some parts of that country seems to have been magnified by the length of time that has passed since the forebears of the individuals there left Ireland. Any Government must be able to project their policies internationally, and particularly in the United States. In places such as Boston, it is necessary to win the war of words and promote understanding of the difficulties of government in Northern Ireland. The imposition of draconian measures and the use of detention in Northern Ireland would inevitably lead to a massive backlash in the United States and we would head towards another range of problems.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, which was much vilified by some people in Northern Ireland, was of massive significance in the United States. The consul-general in Boston told me that, before the Anglo-Irish Agreement, he was frequently barracked as he left his residence, and was subjected to much vilification in the United States. The Anglo-Irish Agreement, which showed that the Government of the United Kingdom was working with the Government of the Republic of Ireland, removed from those who wished to cause trouble in the United States one of their strongest weapons—the argument that the British were acting contrary to the interests of the people of Ireland. The Anglo-Irish Agreement has been important in helping to win the publicity battle.

I share the incredulity of the hon. and learned Member for North Down that it is not possible to take more action against terrorism in Northern Ireland. The first time that I was duty Minister and was asked to sign a certificate to allow the release, on compassionate grounds for a wedding, of a person who had been guilty of terrorist crime, I expressed incredulity that a convicted terrorist should be allowed out of prison to attend a wedding. I was minded not to sign that certificate, and had to be persuaded that it was in line with normal tradition in Northern Ireland and that it would have been counter-productive not to have signed it.

I understand the impatience of many people in Northern Ireland that more cannot be done to enforce the rules against terrorism; nevertheless, I believe that the Government are committed to the right path. It is, as outlined in the Bill, to take for a reduced period of two years a range of powers which include judicial matters, military activity and various matters relating to the emergency legislation.

Many people may be impatient with the position in Northern Ireland, but I recall an interesting and perceptive article by Matthew Parris in *The Spectator* just before Christmas in which he pointed out how wise my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has been in handling the problems in Northern Ireland, and that many people would have said, "I need an answer now. I must resolve this problem now." The problems in Northern Ireland cannot be resolved now. It will take time, patience and diplomatic skill, all of which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office have to an exceptional degree.

As part of their armoury in dealing with the difficult circumstances they face, it is appropriate that we should place again on the statute book a range of measures—some of which are available now and some of which are available prospectively—to ensure that, if necessary, the Government can use those powers, although in many cases they will not be required. The Bill is well judged and deserves our support.

8.23 pm

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I shall speak briefly to pay tribute to a number of activities in the city of Sheffield, where I live. Since the peace declaration last year, a number of groups have done an enormous amount to focus attention on the peace process and the need to ensure that it continues.

About two years ago, an initial meeting in Sheffield to promote peace in Northern Ireland drew a comparison between Northern Ireland and South Africa. During that discussion, some quite moving speeches convinced me and the 100 other people who attended that emphasis on

terrorism was not the best way to promote peace in countries and societies with a history of cultural antagonism between different communities. The meeting was controversial, because it was addressed by Sinn Fein councillors. At the time, the Government were not speaking to Sinn Fein, nor were its representatives allowed to be reported in the media.

Some 18 months later, the people who had organised the meeting held a conference in Sheffield which brought people from all parties and from all the grass roots organisations in Northern Ireland and many organisations in the city together to discuss how to build on the peace process, which by then was six months old. It was noticeable that many people described the useful work that was being done by local communities in Northern Ireland to build joint approaches on education and trade and to work within the European Community.

Those meetings and that conference made it clear to me that the emphasis on prevention of terrorism legislation and the emergency provisions was not the key to promoting peace in Northern Ireland. That is why I am pleased to say a few words tonight to endorse wholeheartedly the reasoned amendment. If we are to give the peace process the significant boost it needs, we should be prepared to criticise and deplore any acts of violence in Northern Ireland, but we should also make sure that we are on record as saying that the correct way forward to stimulate the peace process is not further to endorse the emergency powers and the assumption that the violence in Northern Ireland is exceptional from a United Kingdom point of view.

We cannot have it both ways. If we are intent on integrating Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom and ensuring that Northern Ireland has the same standards of education and levels of service that we would expect in the rest of the United Kingdom, we must apply the same standards of justice and make the same assumptions about people's rights and liberties there. As long as the emergency powers exist, that cannot be said to be true by Members of the Westminster Parliament.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Jackson: No. I am making a short speech.

It is important that hon. Members on both sides of the House—I hope that the Opposition's amendment will receive some support from Conservative Members—make it clear that the continuation of emergency powers is not the correct way forward, and that we are not in favour of that approach. The emergency powers go against the normal civil liberties that I expect as a citizen of the United Kingdom, including the right to trial by jury and the right not to be imprisoned without due cause—in other words, internment. Those liberties or rights should belong to every person in the United Kingdom. That is fundamental.

It is against that background that, since becoming a Member of this place, I have consistently voted against the continuation of prevention of terrorism legislation. I am conscious, of course, that we are talking about the emergency provisions in Northern Ireland, and I shall vote against their continuation.

8.31 pm

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): I am sorry that I was unable to be present for the earlier part of the debate. My absence was unavoidable, because I was serving on a Standing Committee. I wish, however, to say a few words in support of the extension of the measures set out in the Bill. Unlike the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson), I have always supported their extension.

I recognise and welcome the changing situation in Northern Ireland. I hope that, in the near future, the House will be able to make major changes to the legislation that bears on the Province.

The massive improvement in security in Northern Ireland is much to be welcomed, as is the impact that it has had on the mainland as well. Tremendous steps have been taken that even a few years ago would probably have been regarded as impossible in such a short period. Those steps are in everyone's interests. I am optimistic that there will be further dramatic improvements.

I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate all those on all sides who have made the dramatic improvement possible. In particular, I thank my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister for the lead which he has given. I congratulate him on the caution which he has rightly shown when dealing with Irish affairs. Unfortunately, killings are still being carried out. It is sad that there were more examples over the Christmas period. They are clearly linked in some way with terrorist organisations.

There is always a need to be cautious when dealing with terrorism because it is, to a great extent, unpredictable. There is always a danger of resurgence.

There are two particular reasons why I think it right to retain the array of measures that are set out in the Bill. First, it is necessary to maintain full ability to implement such measures in the event of an unfortunate breakdown in security. We would be foolish, even after 16 months, to imagine that such a breakdown is not a possibility. We must be prepared, although we hope for and are talking about a long-term peaceful settlement. That must be so while it is clear that terrorist organisations continue to exist, and retain their weapons and the ability to use them.

It would be foolish for the House to change the legal framework in which terrorism can be combated until we have seen clear progress in decommissioning.

We should, however, consider reducing proportionally the strength of the security measures as progress is made. I am aware that that has already happened in the workings of the military in Northern Ireland, where soldiers have come off the streets. Indeed, three major units have been relocated from Northern Ireland. Much greater reliance has been put on the police service operating in the same way as in the rest of the United Kingdom. Military action in support of the RUC has fallen by about three quarters over the relevant period. Practical steps have been taken in the right direction.

Mr. Devlin: Does my hon. Friend agree that the flaw in the argument of some Opposition Members is that the situation in Northern Ireland, although much improved, is not as good as it is in Sheffield, for example, or in other parts of the United Kingdom? The security forces still have to be in Northern Ireland in case there is a resurgence of long-standing problems. The recent difficulties—for example, shootings that are claimed to be associated with drugs—show that we cannot afford to withdraw all the measures in the hope that, somehow, the peace process will result in a good end.

Mr. Merchant: My hon. Friend is entirely right. It is not a matter of what the situation in Northern Ireland is

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like now or what it was last week or six months ago. Unfortunately, there is an explosive potential that is not present in Sheffield, I am glad to say, that must be taken into account. We must ensure that mechanisms are available to the security forces and that the law in Northern Ireland matches the situation that exists or as it might exist rather than as it exists in other parts of the United Kingdom.

The second way in which recognition is given to the changes in Northern Ireland is in the reduction of the period covered by the Bill to two years. There is ample evidence that that is the right course. There is evidence also that my hon. Friend the Minister would like a further relaxation of the legislative framework if it is matched by action from the terrorist organisations that still exist. My hon. Friend said:

> "As soon as the security situation permits the Government intends to ask Parliament to suspend individual provisions in the current Act or introduce them in a lapsed form on enactment of the Bill."

The guarantee is there. It is merely a question of timing.

It is right that the current legislation should be retained for the time being because it is entirely appropriate to wait for the results of the overall review of methods of combating terrorism. Once the legislation that relates to the battle against terrorism has been fully reviewed and set in a modern context, given the changing events in Northern Ireland, that will be the right moment for a proper and long-term settlement, which will bear on all the legislation that deals with terrorism.

The House should continue to support the current Act and look to the future. It is to be hoped that the future will be much rosier and that it will be possible to make changes without risking the lives of innocent people in Northern Ireland and of those who have laboured for so long to protect them.

8.39 pm

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): I am deeply grateful to my hon. Friends and to Conservative Members for leaving sufficient time for my winding-up speech.

I shall deal first with a point that has arisen on a number of occasions during the debate. It concerns the bipartisan approach, which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) reiterated, we would pursue. During the debate, I wrote down some synonyms for the word "bipartisan", and I came up with "mutual", "joint", "collaborative", "integrated". I did not come up with "We decide, and you follow." I did not come up with what occurred on the last day before Christmas, when we had to table an amendment or response to a Bill that we had not seen. It was not published until the last day before the House shut down for Christmas. Whether we tabled an amendment depended on whether hon. Members managed to prolong a debate on the Humber bridge. We got this Bill only when there was a severe danger that the business of the House was about to collapse.

"Bipartisan" does not mean that. It does not mean that we have a Bill right at the end of the Session, where the Government, using the traditional tactics, smuggle something out, making no comment on it. Although we are committed to a bipartisan approach—it is far too serious a business for anything else—we have to ask the Government, please, to respect the wishes of the Opposition and at least allow us to see the proposed legislation before the closing date for tabling an amendment. That is a very important point to make.

We would have welcomed the chance to sit down with the Government, to put points about the proposed legislation, not just in early June. We would have liked to continue that process and to ask what is in it that can meet our traditional objectives and the general objective that there should be in anti-terrorist legislation. The objections about the way in which the Bill was introduced have come not just from Opposition Members but, as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), the Government's own advisers. The Standing Advisory Committee on Human Relations has also objected to the fact that, although promises were given that it would be consulted on such legislation, it was not.

Much of the debate has featured the appalling killings and beatings, as paramilitary organisations enact their own brutality in their own areas. From the Labour party's viewpoint, let us make no mistake that that is terrorism of the most stark and literal kind. It is rule by terror. It is just as serious if it is rule by terror of nationalist areas as it would be if it was the terrorising of one's opponents. There has been no more unconvincing a sight—many hon. Members have referred to this—on our screens through December and the early part of January than Mr. Mitchel McLaughlin of Sinn Fein failing to condemn the killings and beatings. He was the only person on the box who was less credible than Mystic Meg. He knows that he cannot criticise Sinn Fein without losing his position as front man of that organisation.

The Government know, as do we, that the killings and beatings could be stopped if Sinn Fein and the IRA wanted it. The most clear-cut sign of that was during President Clinton's visit. Let us look at the figures that were given to me in a parliamentary answer by the Minister, who is present tonight. Between June and December, there were 126 punishment beatings. Between 22 November and 4 December—the fortnight around President Clinton's visit—no such attacks were carried out—none at all. The cynicism of that is chilling, but, unfortunately, when CBS's cameras were switched away, the killings and beatings were switched on again.

I do not know whether Sinn Fein and the IRA realise—or whether they care—the extent to which their own democratic credibility is being destroyed by those actions. Confronted by that situation, the choice we all have to make is whether not to move until that appalling behaviour stops or to grasp the opportunity to show the way forward and away from inappropriate so-called "emergency" legislation.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House—people of good will—made passionate speeches tonight and reached different conclusions. The Labour party believes that this is the time to demonstrate our own democratic credentials to the full.

It was interesting that very few hon. Members looking at the matter from the other viewpoint demonstrated how the proposed legislation was helpful at this time, in this situation. In fact, I cannot remember anyone doing that. They did not pray in aid the proposed legislation for dealing with the problem that is occurring at the moment.

It is worth pointing out that the Government's decision to extend the emergency provisions Act by two years gives the EPA the chance to mark its silver jubilee in 1998. Very few non-emergency laws last for 25 years, as this one will if it gets its Second Reading.

Mr. Devlin: Is it not a sad fact that the current court system in Northern Ireland, the so-called Diplock courts, will have to remain, because, in the current climate, with the terrorist beatings, murders and so on, it will not be possible to conduct trials on the same basis as in, say, Stockton-on-Tees, Sheffield or anywhere else in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Worthington: It is not an either/or situation. The Secretary of State might make a judgment that certain offences need to remain under Diplock courts. A way forward would be to demonstrate, either by using the certifying-in procedure or some other mechanism, that we are gradually moving away from the Diplock courts. One of the things that we would have liked to discuss with the Government was the way in which one can move away from the Diplock courts. The Labour party recognises that there has to be anti-terrorist legislation.

One of the striking things about the debate was that it was portrayed by people of intelligence that by voting against the measure, the Labour party was against anti-terrorist legislation. That is not true. Simply because one votes against a particular Government health measure does not mean that one is anti-health. Simply because one votes against a particular Government education measure does not mean that one is anti-education. One is being asked to judge whether this is the right form of anti-terrorist legislation, and I hope to demonstrate tonight that we, like the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), the leader of the Ulster Unionists, do not believe it is.

We also recognise, as does international opinion about emergency laws, that one should not keep laws in existence where there is only the threat of emergency rather than reality. That is what international bodies are now criticising Britain for. It is not enough to say that we should keep the legislation because the threat of an emergency exists; we must demonstrate that there is currently a need for the powers that it contains. Labour recognises that, if it were in office, it would need anti-terrorist powers. We have approached the matter as if we were the Government—as we may be before the legislation reaches the statute book. We are not talking theoretically; we are criticising not simply for the sake of it, but with a sense of total responsibility.

My hon. Friend the Member for Redcar spelled out what is wrong with the measure and with the Government's approach to it. Soon after the start of the ceasefires, we said that the emergency legislation needed to be reviewed—if for no other reason than because parts of the legislation, particularly those providing for internment, could be used as a recruiting sergeant for the paramilitaries. That was pointed out by the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron).

The establishment of a review is clear evidence to the world—to this Parliament, to all in Northern Ireland, to the United Nations, to the European Court of Human Rights, to President Clinton and Senator Mitchell—that the British Government have done all the homework necessary to push the peace process on. Indeed, that is clear to all, both north and south of the border. It is important for the Government to show that they are at the forefront in promoting fair democratic values and human rights.

Mr. Maginnis: The hon. Gentleman has used the throwaway phrase "recruiting sergeant for terrorism". That is not necessarily true just because someone says it. It would be much more helpful if the hon. Gentleman would consider the many ways in which the Government and parties such as mine have tried to encourage Sinn Fein-IRA to eschew violence and to move into the democratic mood. That has been kicked in our faces again and again. Why does the hon. Gentleman think that appearing to be soft in legislation to deal with terrorism will bring him some reward?

Mr. Worthington: It is not a question of being soft; it is a question whether anti-terrorism legislation is effective. Governments have been saying for 20 years that internment is not effective anti-terrorism legislation because they dare not introduce it—and they dare not introduce it because they know just how ineffective it was when it was introduced before. That ineffectiveness has made the present Government unwilling to introduce internment again. We must send the message that we anticipate no circumstances in which we would introduce internment. What is the point of having legislation that one feels cannot be used, but which will still send a message to those who are marginal—who may be deciding whether to join paramilitary organisations, and making up their minds about what sort of Government the British Government are?

Mr. Peter Robinson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Worthington: May I make a little more progress? We are a little short of time. In Northern Ireland terms, an hour is a mere second. I shall certainly give way later.

What do we have? In June, it was announced that a review was to take place. We would normally expect the announcement of a review to be accompanied by the announcement of its remit and the name of the person conducting the review; however, month after month passed with no such announcement and no start of the review. At the end of October, there was an updating of the codes of practice for the EPA, containing the sentence

"It is unlikely that the Reviewer will report much before the summer of 1996."

Today, at last, we have the announcement of the review committee's membership. We must be critical of the Government for the delay. It is not as if the person who has been chosen—we wish Lord Lloyd well—were inaccessible. After months of trawling the world to find a reviewer, the Government have come up with a lawyer who was born in the same year as the Secretary of State, was called to the Bar in the same year as the Secretary of State and lives 20 miles down the road from the Secretary of State. I admit that one went to Eton and Cambridge and the other to Tonbridge and Oxford, but, after a seven-month delay, the Government have not come up with an unknown figure.

In a press release, the Minister of State said that the reviewer would consider the EPA and the PTA, their working at the present time and their possible amalgamation and incorporation in United Kingdom law

[Mr. Worthington]

by the summer of 1996. The Secretary of State is asking us to believe that Lord Lloyd and Mr. Justice Kerr can do that in far less time than it has taken him to choose someone to head the review committee. He is living in fairyland, and the Government know that. I hope that the Minister will give us a realistic date by which Lord Lloyd will have to report.

We are not alone in saying that the Secretary of State is being too dilatory. The hon. Member for Upper Bann said it in June, before he was translated to his present eminence as leader of his party. What he said then was very different from what was said by the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) today—that there should be "no tinkering or tampering" with the EPA. The hon. Member for Upper Bann said:

"Anti-terrorist legislation cannot be allowed to disappear altogether."

A single Act was needed to replace the present legislation, which, in the hon. Gentleman's view,

"should be on the statute book by March 1996 or August 1996 at the latest."

He called for a single and flexible Act for the United Kingdom. The Labour party would go along with that.

Mr. Trimble: I and my colleagues are intrigued by the conflict that the hon. Gentleman pretends to find between my hon. Friend and me. If he casts his mind back, the hon. Gentleman will recall that my hon. Friend the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) said that the Bill purports to be, and is by and large, simply a re-enactment of the emergency provisions Act. My hon. Friend's critical comments were directed towards the Opposition Front Bench and were that there should be no tinkering with that Act, which merely continues on the statute book until the review is completed, at which time the legislation can be replaced by the single United Kingdom-wide Act that we have called for.

It is perfectly correct to say that, last June, I said that that could be done by 1996, so that we would not have had to extend the emergency provisions Act. It would be fine if we could go back to June and replay events, but we have to deal with the situation as it is. We cannot allow the emergency provisions Act to lapse, as the hon. Gentleman would like, thus leaving the people of Northern Ireland without protection, as he would want.

Mr. Worthington: I shall deal first with the hon. Gentleman's first point. In June, he was highly critical of the Government's behaviour over the emergency powers, and said that the Government were too dilatory. I do not know what word one would use in January about not having made further progress. But in June the hon. Gentleman said:

"I do not see any difficulty in proceeding to put together a consolidated Act which could be used to cover the continuing situation . . . as well as international terrorism."

The hon. Gentleman said that the Act

"should be on the statute book by March 1996 or August 1996 at the latest . . . If the Secretary of State proceeds in the slow manner that he has indicated, the Government will end up looking foolish and we do not want that to happen on this issue."—[*Official Report*, 12 June 1995; Vol. 261, c. 530-31.]

Do the Government now look foolish?

Mr. Trimble: The only person who appears to be looking foolish at the moment is the hon. Gentleman, because he is taking something completely out of context and putting it in quite a different way. Of course, if the review had been put in place last June, as I urged the Government to do, we would not now have to renew the emergency provisions Act, but we have to renew that Act, and in that context it is absolutely foolish to vote against a measure that is clearly needed.

If the hon. Gentleman wants to make something out of the fact that occasionally on this legislation I have disagreed with the Government, he can go back through earlier debates on the issue and look at Committee reports on the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) (Amendment) Act 1991 and subsequent criminal justice Acts. If he does that, he will find many occasions on which I moved amendments to try to persuade the Government to alter the legislation on much more substantial issues than that on which the Opposition are manufacturing a Division tonight.

Mr. Worthington: In no way will we leave the people of Northern Ireland without anti-terrorist legislation. That was clearly stated by my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar. We all agree that the danger to peace comes from the terrorists, but we have to do all we can to assist the peace process by showing our willingness to tackle contentious issues such as emergency legislation. We cannot continue with the status quo: we must show that we are fully considering those matters.

We could send constructive messages to the world, to everybody who is watching this process, by dropping the parts of the legislation that we do not wish to use. The Secretary of State made much of his willingness to use the old section 61 to drop or to suspend particular parts of the legislation. We thought, judging by the press release that was issued by the Minister of State on 20 December, that there would be more in the Bill, because the press release states:

"As soon as the security situation permits the Government intends to ask Parliament to suspend individual provisions in the current Act or to introduce them in a lapsed form on enactment of the Bill."

It would be interesting if, in his winding-up speech, the Minister of State could help us by outlining marginal areas where it is contemplated that some of the Bill's provisions could be dropped. Are we to go into Committee where there is no attempt at a meeting of minds or to be bipartisan, or are there areas where the Government can be persuaded to make changes?

Mr. Alex Carlile: Both the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) have told us that a Labour Government would introduce emergency provisions legislation. Will he now send a clear message, to use his phrase, to the House by telling us what would be in that Labour legislation to protect Northern Ireland's people from terrorism? What would be that legislation's positive elements? We have not heard that yet tonight.

Mr. Worthington: We have backed the Government totally on their intention of having a review that, for the first time, considers the amalgamation of the EPA and the prevention of terrorism Act in a United Kingdom context, as is the intention. What we find difficult to take is why, in a situation as sensitive as this, the Government are dragging their feet on the easy bit of the anti-terrorist procedure—setting up the right machinery.

We are disappointed that the Secretary of State has been unable to be more positive in this legislation. Why could he not come, for instance, with a commitment from

the Chief Constable that, in all possible circumstances, he would use the powers and procedures under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 rather than under the emergency powers? I asked for that in June—a simple commitment and statement by the Chief Constable that, where possible, one will use the normal law rather than the emergency powers. Such a simple statement would be easy to give if the intention were there.

The Government stated today that they were now willing to use silent video recordings in holding centres. We had been hoping that both audio and video recordings would be used in such centres. I find it hard to understand the Secretary of State's difficulty on this matter. We know that the Chief Constable has had reservations about it in terms of intimidation of witnesses or of the police if tapes found their way into the wrong hands, but, as the Secretary of State will know, his own commissioner on the holding centres, Sir Louis Blom-Cooper, has found ways of combating that and of safeguarding the tapes—that is what the procedure would involve. It would be interesting to Labour Members if the Minister of State could say why he has rejected Louis Blom-Cooper's recommendations and has gone for the recommendation of silent video recordings—that sounds strange.

The Rowe report—no one reading Rowe could feel that he was in the presence of a wild radical—said that there should be audio taping of interviews at holding centres, and that it should start as soon as possible. His 1995 report says:

"I have examined this topic before. I do not rehearse all the points."

He goes on to say:

"Several judges within the last year in Northern Ireland have mentioned in open Court the advantage of audio taping of interviews, in particular with reference to the time saved in trying cases. Quite apart from the saving of time, the taping of an interview would protect both the suspect and interviewing officer."

It is therefore the judgment not of the Labour party, but of Rowe and of many judges in Northern Ireland, that audio taping would not hinder the process of justice in Northern Ireland. It would facilitate that process. They ask for the facilitating of justice and for audio and video reports. We want to know from the Minister of State why that advice from the judiciary and from Rowe is not being accepted.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Has the hon. Gentleman had any opportunity, as I have, to talk to the Royal Ulster Constabulary, who conduct these interviews? If so, police officers will have told him clearly that, if the interviews are recorded in any way, a prisoner is much less likely to tell the police anything at all for fear of blackmail. Is it important to try to impose an English-style system which works fine in England, but which in Northern Ireland—where there is intimidation, blackmail and comeback—would silence the very person from whom the police must obtain information? The hon. Gentleman must accept that there are different circumstances in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Worthington: I must ask the hon. Lady—at the risk of being given another speech—whether she is speaking against the Government's recommendation on video recordings. A look of panic came over the hon. Lady's face when she realised that she was speaking against the Government's recommendation. We are to have a video—according to the hon. Lady that is all right—but the audio recording will not exist.

A serious question was being asked about the police. My impression of what the police are saying—I feel that I have been speaking to the police in Northern Ireland recently more often than the hon. Lady—is that many of them have experienced recording in normal criminal cases, regard it as a tool and aid, and would welcome it being extended to scheduled offences and the holding centres. We know that the Chief Constable is against that, but I do not make the mistake of saying that, because the Chief Constable has said that, all the police say that.

Mr. Maginnis: The hon. Gentleman must not try to mislead the House by suggesting that there is a clamour among rank and file police to have either video or audio recordings in the holding centres. The police who work there and who strive to gain information that will not just convict the person being questioned but help to undermine the structure of terrorism, are totally dependent on the information that they can receive from those whom they are questioning. Audio and video recordings will impede that work.

Mr. Worthington: The hon. Gentleman says that I must not pretend that the rank and file police are clamouring for the measure. I did not do that.

In June, the Secretary of State said of holding centres:

"Assuming that the continued absence of violence will allow the downward trend to continue there will, I hope, come a time when the need to use the more rigorous regime afforded by the holding centres will disappear entirely . . . That must be our aim, although we are not there yet."

I believe that the Secretary of State said that there had continued to be a downward trend.

When I saw the legislation and realised that it contained no reference to holding centres, I wondered whether the Secretary of State would today announce that those centres would disappear and we would turn to the ordinary Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, but he did not. He told us that there would be silent video recordings. The Secretary of State said that, even if he cannot discard the holding centres, the Government will propose introducing an electronic recording scheme. I assume that silent video recording constitutes an electronic recording scheme.

The Secretary of State continued:

"That will be in the Bill that will be required next Session to replace the present Act. Such a scheme will require statutory provision, because it remains important for arrangements to be in place to prevent tapes from being disclosed by those who might have sinister motives."—[*Official Report*, 12 June 1995; Vol. 261, c. 507.]

May I assume from that statement that in Committee the Minister will table an amendment respecting the Secretary of State's statement that the introduction of electronic recording requires an addition to the Act?

Sir Patrick Mayhew *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Worthington: The Secretary of State is shaking his head, so I fear the worst.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The hon. Gentleman is making a substantial meal of the matter. I am glad to deal with the question of what I said on 12 June. I said, as he rightly reported, that we would propose to introduce a measure of electronic recording. I did not specify what form that electronic recording would take. It was uncertain at that stage what would be practicable and what the advice

[Sir Patrick Mayhew]

would be. Had it been in the form of audio recording, it would have been necessary to have statutory safeguards. That was why there would have had to be provision in the Bill.

For the reasons that I have given, the advice to me is consistent only with it being prudent to introduce a measure of electronic recording in the form of silent video recording. There is no need for statutory safeguard in respect of that, for reasons that will be apparent. That is why there is no reference to it in the Bill, and there will be no application made and no amendment moved in Committee.

Mr. Worthington: The words before me are clear. The Secretary of State said that the introduction of an electronic recording scheme would require statutory alterations. We will have to take consultation on that. It is interesting that the promise made by the Secretary of State in June of an electronic recording scheme was his second position. He said that that would require an alteration to the Act, yet that is now not going to occur. Silent video recording will be introduced without guidelines or alterations to the Act. Or am I wrong?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: There will be a code of practice.

Mr. Worthington: I hear what the Secretary of State says from a sedentary position.

In his winding-up speech, will the Minister of State further confirm that it is his firm intention one day to get rid of Diplock courts and to bring back trials by jury in similar circumstances to those existing in Great Britain? Parts of the Act, such as the provision to hold Diplock courts in other parts of Northern Ireland than in Belfast, could be interpreted as a form of entrenchment of Diplock courts in the judicial system. It would be helpful if the Minister could give the clearest of commitments on that policy because I hear talk in some parts of the House of how well the Diplock courts have functioned, which implies—perhaps—some weakening of that firm intention.

Lady Olga Maitland: On that point.

Mr. Worthington: I am now running out of time— *[Interruption.]*

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way, since the point about the ending of Diplock courts is important. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, if trials by jury were brought in before the whole peace process was totally satisfactorily resolved, there would be a danger that juries would not dare to convict for fear of intimidation? Surely the hon. Gentleman is putting the cart before the horse?

Mr. Worthington: I welcome the hon. Lady to the debate somewhat late in the day. She has now spoken for longer than some hon. Members who have been present for the whole debate. We have said repeatedly that there is no way in which the Diplock courts can be abandoned overnight. They have to be phased out. We have suggested that they should be phased out in such a way that they should disappear last in those areas where threats of intimidation or risks to justice are most severe. That is clear.

Why have the Government kept internment in the Bill? It has not been used since 1975. It is the principal source of irritation between the United Kingdom and the international community. The Government's reviewers comprehensively have come out against it. It was rejected by Lord Gardiner in 1975. It was rejected by Sir George Baker in 1984. It was rejected by Lord Colville in 1990, who said:

"As things stand now,"—

this was at a much more grave time in Northern Ireland—

"I can only endorse with vigour Sir George Baker's recommendation: no detention."

It was rejected by John Rowe in 1995. It was rejected by the Government's advisory body on human rights. The view of John Rowe in 1994 in the fundamental review was that internment should not be re-enacted in any new EPA. One has to remember that he wrote that in a pre-ceasefire context. Still the Government keep internment in the Bill.

Internment is a difficult issue. It is a confession of failure by a democratic state dedicated to the rule of law. It is a statement that the rule of law does not work. We have had internment on our statutes for 25 years. We cannot keep it there just in case the situation worsens. We do not understand why the Government cannot see how important it is to occupy the high ground by being associated only with laws that follow the soundest principles of international law and the protection of human rights.

The Government had an opportunity in the Bill to say that they meant to entrench and deepen the peace by moving to laws that were not emergency laws but laws of peace, of which one could be proud. The Government have failed to take that opportunity. That is why we have tabled a reasoned amendment. That is why we shall go into Committee armed with amendments to persuade the Government that, after 25 years, they should grasp the opportunities that the peace offers. That is why we shall be voting against the Bill.

9.22 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Sir John Wheeler): The House has considered the Government's Bill at length and in detail since early afternoon. It is right that the House should have had that amount of time to consider such an important measure in detail. I am grateful to the large number of hon. Members on both sides of the House who have spoken in the debate. I am especially grateful to those who intend to support the Government in the Division Lobby later tonight.

I also listened with great care to those who have a contrary view. In matters of this kind, it behoves any Government to listen with great care to points of concern about the issues that we have considered today, especially as they relate to the criminal justice system and the concept of liberty. I shall respond to as many points as possible in the time available. First, I shall take up the remarks of the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington). *[Interruption.]* I am obliged to the Scottish representatives for their correction of my pronunciation of the hon. Gentleman's constituency. I suspect that I shall have the pleasure of referring to the hon. Gentleman and his constituency quite frequently during the Standing Committee which we shall commence shortly.

The hon. Gentleman began his remarks by criticising the Government for publishing the Bill on the last day before the Christmas recess. I regret any inconvenience that that caused the hon. Gentleman and Opposition spokesmen, and it was not the Government's intention to embarrass him or his colleagues or to cause them inconvenience. But the fact is that the process of preparing this Bill was lengthy, and there were many detailed issues which had to be considered right up to the last moment. As a matter of fact, the day concerned was a sitting day of this House, and it was perfectly proper to employ that day for the business of Her Majesty's Government. Having said that, I regret the inconvenience that was caused to the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Gentleman made the serious point that so-called punishment attacks stopped in Northern Ireland when the President of the United States paid his visit. That was a cynical piece of behaviour on the part of Provisional IRA-Sinn Fein. The fact is that Mr. Adams and the leadership of that structure are able to stop the violence when it suits their purpose, and the hon. Gentleman was right to make that point as strongly as he did.

The hon. Gentleman went on to say that emergency legislation of one kind or another will have been on the statute book for some 25 years by the time the review is over. Who in this House would not regret that? But the problem is that it is not this House that is the cause of that emergency legislation, but those who seek to kill, to intimidate, to maim and to attack others in pursuit of their criminal endeavours. Those people are the reason why this House has to consider exceptional measures to deal with exceptional circumstances.

Lady Olga Maitland: Has my right hon. Friend taken evidence or had an opportunity to meet Families Against Intimidation and Terror, an organisation of which I have the honour to be one of the patrons? If he had done so, he would have heard first-hand accounts of the brutality and intimidation carried out—often against young teenagers—by Sinn Fein-IRA. Young people are having their legs smashed up, and they are taken to the Royal Victoria hospital. Surgeons have told me that it is only by the grace of God that somebody has not yet died as a result of these punishment beatings. It is absolutely essential that we are well aware of the seriousness of what is going on. We cannot take the matter for granted or be complacent.

Sir John Wheeler: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. My only regret is that her attendance in Committee prevented her from being in the House this afternoon to make the kind of contribution that she has just made. She is absolutely right to refer—as others have done during the debate—to the work of FAIT and others who support those who have been intimidated and exiled from Northern Ireland as a part of the terrorist campaign against those of whom the terrorists disapprove. My hon. Friend is quite right to draw attention to that, and that is why we are obliged to consider the Bill today.

I shall continue my comments on comments of the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie. The House will have been somewhat puzzled by his approach. He says that he does not believe that the Bill is in the right form. The Bill is in the form that it is to deal with the circumstances that have prevailed for the past quarter of a century.

The hon. Gentleman says that he recognises the need for special legislation—although not, apparently, the Bill. However, if he was considering afresh, with a blank sheet of paper, what he would want to have to deal with the situation, he would do as the Government have done during the past few decades. He would consult the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and many others in the judiciary and elsewhere. He would inquire about what the provisions should be to meet the character of the threat that the people of Northern Ireland have faced so bravely and courageously for so many years. He would be driven to the conclusion that the measures that the House is being invited to support tonight are the measures that he would be obliged to set down in a legislative framework.

I am therefore puzzled that the hon. Gentleman should come to the view that he should urge on his hon. Friends the need to vote against the Government's proposals this evening. I regret that, but I accept that he is as firm in his opposition to terrorism as any other hon. Member. I am especially grateful to him for the clarity of his statement in that regard.

The hon. Gentleman said that we would not leave the people of Northern Ireland without the protection of the right kind of legislation. Why, then, does he intend to vote against the Bill tonight? If his view prevailed, the people of Northern Ireland would indeed be left without the appropriate protection.

The hon. Gentleman posed a number of questions, and I shall seek to deal with them before I turn to other points raised in the debate. He asked about the date for the completion of the independent review. We very much hope that Lord Lloyd and his judicial assistant from Northern Ireland will be able to report as soon as possible. I emphasise the words "as soon as possible", but given the nature of the review and the fact that it will cover the concerns of not only Northern Ireland but Great Britain, it will take time.

What is important is that the reviewer should be able to present for proper scrutiny to the House and to the wider public a considered and full document which covers all the issues. He should not feel that he is under any time pressure to deliver a report, but rather that he can be thorough in his consideration of it. It may well be that, if Lord Lloyd requires the time, it will not be until the autumn of this year that he can produce his report for the House's examination.

The hon. Gentleman asked which provisions could be lapsed and when. It is difficult for the Government to speculate about which provisions may be candidates for early lapsing. Those decisions must, of necessity, be taken on the advice that the Government receive from the Chief Constable, who is the principal security adviser to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State. If one has such a person in office, it behoves one to listen to the advice given. The Government will depend on that advice and on the analysis that the Chief Constable is able to give on the improvement in the security situation. I cannot, therefore, second-guess what that advice will be and I cannot say which provisions in the Act will be able to be lapsed. I am sure that the House will understand the reason for that.

The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie and others asked why we could not return to the Police and Criminal Evidence Act provisions. I, for one, would like

[Sir John Wheeler]

to do that, and I am sure that the House would like to, but one of the features of the debate this afternoon has been the reminder to the House of the state of the security situation in Northern Ireland. It must be obvious, therefore, that, until the security situation substantially improves, it will not be possible to employ the PACE procedures in the police offices of Northern Ireland. I very much hope that the day will come when that will be possible.

The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie also referred to the Diplock courts. They have, rightly, been praised for the quality of justice from the judiciary of Northern Ireland and the impression that the hon. Gentleman may have formed that those courts would therefore be a permanent feature are, I am glad to assure him, mistaken. I would welcome the ending of the Diplock court procedure, and one day it will go. It will go when people are able to be members of a jury or witnesses without fear or intimidation. Unhappily, that day has not yet arrived in Northern Ireland.

I turn now to other contributions to the debate. I would like to start with the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) and the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile). I particularly thank them for their contributions, especially in regard to the services of the judiciary in Northern Ireland, which without doubt has given remarkable service during the past 25 years. It has never been intimidated and has always done its duty to the criminal justice system fairly and objectively. Its judgments have stood the test of vigorous examination in many places, which is a great tribute to it.

I am particularly glad that the hon. Lady and the hon. and learned Gentleman should single it out for especial praise for its work. I would add that the services of the resident magistrates have been equally commendable and they, too, deserve the thanks of the House for their work towards the upholding of an effective criminal justice system.

The hon. Member for Redcar was right to make her commitment to the rule of law. The House is united in the principle of the rule of law. That has been a theme of many hon. Members in the debate tonight. The hon. Lady also gave much credit to the Royal Ulster Constabulary for its achievements. During the past 25 years, 300 members of the RUC have been killed and more than 7,000 injured in the course of their duties. The RUC, too, is a major contributor to what is called the peace process. Its steadfastness down through the years has contributed to the process that we are engaged upon, and I am particularly glad to accept the hon. Lady's tribute to them and her comments.

I am responsible for drugs policy in Northern Ireland, and I also welcome her remarks about that. The RUC has strengthened its unit, and the Government in Northern Ireland have brought together all the departments in Northern Ireland, including education, to mount a co-ordinated campaign using the criminal justice system, information and the school room in every way to try to reduce the incidence of drug abuse in Northern Ireland.

In an intervention, the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) asked about the authorised investigator powers. I particularly want to deal with the hon. Gentleman's question, because it is an important one. He inquired about the continuing availability of the authorised investigator and his powers. I can assure him and the House that the powers currently in section 57 and schedule 5 of the EPA to deal with racketeering will continue to be available by means of article 49 and schedule 2 of the proceeds of crime legislation which was laid before the House on 11 December last year.

Mr. Trimble: I thank the Minister for giving way on that very important point. Can he assure me that the provisions that he mentioned in the proceeds of crime legislation are exactly the same as the provisions that they are replacing in the emergency provisions legislation? Can he assure me that they are exactly the same, as my cursory reading of the legislation suggests that there are significant differences?

If the provisions were continued in the emergency provisions legislation, we would have the opportunity to debate and amend them in Committee. We will not have that opportunity with regard to the proceeds of crime legislation. The Minister may not be in a position to give me a detailed answer now, but I ask him to examine the matter. If there are differences, will he give us the opportunity to ensure that the proceeds of crime legislation is brought into line with the provisions that existed in the emergency provisions Act?

Sir John Wheeler: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that important point. I can give him the assurance that he seeks: the proceeds of crime legislation, which is currently before the House, will replicate the measures that have hitherto been part of the law. The Government have no intention of diminishing the ability or the role of the authorised investigator. If there should be any doubt about that, the hon. Gentleman is very welcome to pursue the matter with me on a separate occasion, when I shall endeavour to assist him as much as possible.

I shall now try to pick up some of the many important points that were raised during the debate. I am particularly grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter), who spoke so authoritatively and powerfully early in the debate. He made the cogent point that the threat to civil liberty comes from the terrorists. It does not come from the Bill or from the House of Commons; it comes from those who perpetuate evil in Northern Ireland against the people of Northern Ireland. I think that he made a very persuasive point.

He said that the terrorists keep open the possibility of a return to violence. As my right hon. and learned Friend said in his opening remarks, that, unhappily, remains the case. As long as they persist in retaining the enormous arsenal of weapons and as long as they structure and organise themselves in a state of readiness to return to full-scale violence, the legislation is essential.

My hon. Friend welcomed the review that the right hon. Lord Lloyd is about to undertake, and I am grateful for his support in that regard. He made a good point about the question of internment when he said that a special vote in the House would mean that the birds would fly before we could bring the measure into use. He is quite right. If we needed to use the internment power, it would have to be used with great immediacy; otherwise, there would be no point in using it at all. He also made the

point that audio recording would deter co-operation but that silent recording is acceptable as a safeguard. Others made the same point.

Mr. Canavan: When I pressed the Secretary of State earlier, he failed to give any justification for the strange decision to reject the recommendation of John Rowe QC that audio taping at holding centres be allowed. The Secretary of State hinted that I would be given a detailed explanation during the wind-up speech. May I have it now, please?

Sir John Wheeler: I understand the hon. Gentleman's frustration. The Government receive advice from a great many quarters—from this honourable House, for instance, from Mr. Rowe, whose services are exemplary, and from others. But my right hon. and learned Friend must also take into account the advice he receives from his principal security adviser, the Chief Constable of the RUC, who has a duty to explain the problems of dealing with terrorist suspects. They are formidable people to deal with, as the House should know.

My right hon. and learned Friend therefore has to weigh the advice from all quarters when coming to a decision on how to implement objective and desirable procedures, in the light of the prevailing security situation. That is how the Government have approached the issue. The hon. Gentleman may not like the decision, but the plain fact is that such decisions have to be made in the round, taking all the circumstances into account—not just some of them which may be partial to one point of view.

Mr. Canavan: What did the Chief Constable offer by way of justification for the strange decision to allow video but not audio taping?

Sir John Wheeler: Others today have already made a case for the procedure by explaining the nature and extent of intimidation. The hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) did so most effectively. Many in the House have endorsed the Government's position by reference to the degree of intimidation and to the need to conduct proper interviews while safeguarding those in the interview room. If it is thought that they have offended others outside the interview room, their very lives, and possibly the lives of their families, are at risk. I therefore suggest that we have a duty to recognise those facts, whether we like them or not.

My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire), in a helpful speech, talked about the need to retain the detention power. He said that it might be seen as a measure taken against the nationalist community. Not so—this century, the Republic has seen fit to retain in its Offences Against the State Act 1939 provision for special criminal courts without juries, which are now used for other serious cases as well as for terrorist cases. That Act also contains provision for internment.

I cannot speak for the Government of the Republic, but I can speak for the Government of the United Kingdom, and I can infer that neither Government would wish to use the measure. As my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne and others have made clear, however, if the House were to remove the provision altogether, it would send a message to the terrorist gangs that would not be helpful, given the current terrorist activity in Northern Ireland.

My hon. Friend rightly asked why Mr. Adams and those who speak for PIRA-Sinn Fein on the television and the wireless do not condemn those murders and attacks. One of the most important developments would be to hear Sinn Fein, that claims to be totally committed to the democratic principle, condemn those evil acts and crimes. If that were to happen, there might be progress.

The hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis), who is both courageous and determined in his support for the Royal Ulster Constabulary, gave the House the chilling facts about the huge arsenal that the Provisional IRA, and to a lesser extent the loyalist terror gangs, still possess. If the Provisional IRA believes in peace, why does it need to retain 2.5 tonnes of Semtex? For what purpose does it require that arsenal of attack weapons?

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the work of the disarmament commission, and asked whether the time of the report could be considered in the light of the need for the commission to take further evidence. The Government fully accept that the deadline set for the commission is very tight. If that body believes that it will need more time to complete its task, I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government would be happy to consider any request that it may make. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's words will carry to the ears of the commission which will have opportunity to review its work and decide whether it wishes to take more time.

The hon. Gentleman rightly referred to the work of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the need to maintain its morale after so many years of loyal service. I appreciated what he said, and I assure him that, in looking at the future of the Royal Ulster Constabulary—its size, its function and its organisation—the Government will be guided by the concept of evolution and not by radical and sudden change. We owe it to the men and women of the RUC to ensure that they are kept informed of all proposed changes and that their views are considered and taken into account.

The hon. Gentleman was right to caution the House about the possible dangers of silent recording in police stations. Others have said that we should go further. The hon. Gentleman, however, reminded Members of the disadvantages that might arise from the extension of those procedures.

I am also grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter), who made a helpful contribution to the debate, and to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) for the support of his party in the Lobby in a few minutes' time. He was right to endorse the multi-partisan approach to Northern Ireland that has been one of the guiding spirits of the debate tonight. He was also right to point out that Provisional Sinn Fein has not yet renounced violence and to draw attention to the injustice of the PIRA murders and expulsions. The European Court of Human Rights does not apply to people who have to flee their homes. There is no right of appeal for them. The hon. and learned Gentleman was quite right to bring that point to the notice of the House.

The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) referred to measures to reduce security. I can assure him and others that all the measures—which have been substantial in the past 16 months—are reversible. They have all been undertaken on the advice of the Chief Constable and the security forces on the basis of what is acceptable in the present circumstances. Such measures can be restored, some extremely rapidly. It is important that the House should know that, should there be an unwelcome deterioration in the security situation.

[Sir John Wheeler]

The House will understand that I have been able only to touch on a few of the many issues that have been raised during the debate. I look forward to pursuing other matters in Committee.

Dr. Hendron: I am sorry to return to something that you mentioned earlier when talking about holding centres. I have been in holding centres many times over the years. You rightly talked about protection for those who are doing the interrogating. But as you well appreciate, the people who are being questioned also need protection. Bearing in mind that the majority of those who have entered the Castlereagh holding centre over the past 20 years have not been charged with any offence, I ask you a direct question. I do not expect an immediate answer. Do you—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The hon. Member has been in the House long enough to know that he refers to a Member either as the hon. Member or, as in this instance, the Minister.

Dr. Hendron: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I ask the Minister to tell us how many people were beaten in Castlereagh, after which compensation was settled out of court. The nationalists in the north of Ireland would appreciate an answer to my question.

Sir John Wheeler: I cannot comment on the detail of the hon. Gentleman's intervention. I recognise that he has a serious point to make. If I can take it up with any advice that is separate from the debate, I shall certainly do so.

I say in passing that the hon. Gentleman referred to the Conlan case. I respect his great integrity in seeking peace in west Belfast. I shall ensure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is made aware of the hon. Gentleman's remarks and responds to him direct.

I shall not repeat anything said by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State in my final remarks. I merely say that the continued terrorist threat demonstrates the wisdom of the positive yet measured response to the ceasefires of the Government and the security forces. The ceasefires have released most people in Northern Ireland from constant fear of a sort that only those who have lived in the shadow of terrorism for 25 years can fully comprehend. People can now see within their grasp a peaceful future. They look forward to the economic and social improvements that that will bring.

For some, sadly, the dark shadow is still there. The words, "They haven't gone away, you know," are still relevant. My right hon. and learned Friend has described the recent brutal murders. He referred also to punishment attacks. During the summer of 1995, 78 attacks took place on Orange halls, churches, chapels and Gaelic Athletic Association properties. The figures speak for themselves. From June to December last year, there were 143 such attacks, of which 48 were attributed to the loyalists and 95 to the republicans. This year, up to and including 7 January, there have been nine punishment attacks, four loyalist and five republican.

We view these murders and attacks with great concern. They underline the Government's concern about arms. No doubt Senator Mitchell's international body will be following events with interest and concern. We are aware of the possible implications for the propriety of maintaining the dialogue with Provisional Sinn Fein. For the moment we believe it right to continue that dialogue. The question of maintaining it, however, given Sinn Fein's apparently equivocal stance on the issue of illegal violence, will remain under review in consultation with the Irish Government.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 206, Noes 295.

Division No. 18] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalls, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hutton, John
Ilsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian

Macdonald, Calum
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Joe Benton and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

NOES

Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Alton, David
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Delvin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Lynne, Ms Liz
McCartney, Robert
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maddock, Diana
Madel, Sir David
Maginnis, Ken
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth

Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Derek Conway.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 60 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading):—

The House divided: Ayes 295, Noes 205.

Division No. 19] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Alton, David
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'lre)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford (South Antrim)
Forth, Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'ham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'sth)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxbowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Farnham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Lynne, Ms Liz
McCartney, Robert
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maddock, Diana
Madel, Sir David
Maginnis, Ken
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Mills, Iain

Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Derek Conway.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen North)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold

Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Joe Benton and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

NORTHERN IRELAND (EMERGENCY PROVISIONS) BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 5OA(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenses of the Secretary of State under that Act.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

Question agreed to.

LICENSING (AMENDMENT) (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 94E(5),

That the Bill be committed to a Special Standing Committee.—[*Dr. Liam Fox.*]

Question agreed to.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

10.29 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I am most grateful to Madam Speaker for granting me this debate this evening. The House has heard over the past seven years a long and sorry catalogue of statements about the environmental impact of the channel tunnel rail link project across the fair county of Kent. Since 1988, blight has been with us, particularly in the borough of Gravesham, but also throughout Kent. The blight originally cut a swathe across my constituency by the villages of Istead Rise and New Barn. For two years, massive blight hit those areas, and British Rail ran a rather generous scheme of buy-out, which was invoked for dozens of properties.

In the autumn of 1990, a new announcement was made that the route would be switched to a line closely parallel with the A2. The new route affected a minimum of properties, some 10, at Henhurst road and Scalers hill in the parish of Cobham. The relevant railway promoter, British Rail's Union Railways subsidiary, showed considerable caution in the light of its previous massive compensation costs. Over the years, I have had to fight for every compensation and buy-out case. All have concerned domestic properties inhabited by their owners.

I have called the debate tonight because of two complex cases involving small businesses which have resulted in the collapse of the businesses, at great cost to the owners. Both cases have been aired before the Select Committee which is considering the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill, but they represent such injustice to what may be termed "little people" that I thought that the House should be made directly aware of them. I should like to ask my hon. Friend the Minister for Railways and Roads to find the means of giving early redress for loss arising directly out of the actions of what were then this country's nationalised industries—British Rail and its subsidiaries.

The first case relates to Mr. and Mrs. Colin Winzar of The Nook, Scalers hill, Cobham. The proposed line of the new route of the rail link went through their house, which was to be demolished by a deep cutting. They bought the property in September 1990, only one month before the announcement of the route. They secured the loan to buy it with a non-status mortgage over the property. Their intention to convert that mortgage to a standard one and to finance further business loans on the free equity of the house was frustrated, because all lenders viewed the property as blighted and effectively worthless as security for borrowings.

Mr. and Mrs. Winzar were at that time proprietors of two profitable companies, an industrial cleaning company and a company of stonemasons. They had contracts with, for example, the corporation of the City of London, Thames Water and a project on Middlesex guildhall, opposite this place across Parliament square. Their inability to raise finance meant that significant contracts were lost; borrowings were impossible; Union Railways refused to make any advance payments on a future purchase—so insurance policies were cashed in. However, all their attempts to keep the businesses going

failed, with the result that the companies ceased to trade in April 1995. Mr. and Mrs. Winzar now exist on income support, and suffer growing overdrafts.

The second case is that of Mr. and Mrs. Smith of Mallard cottage, Old Watling street, Cobham. Their house is also in the direct line of the route of the rail link. It will disappear into a wide cutting which is proposed for Ashenbank wood, a site of special scientific interest, the destruction of which would be a dreadful act of vandalism. Mr. and Mrs. Smith have occupied their property since 1987, and they had a thriving business importing and selling flowers wholesale. Their success led to expansion, and they planned to extend the property.

However, in late 1990 they planned to move the business elsewhere to have scope for expansion. They then found that their property was unsaleable because of the rail link blight. They also ran into business difficulties, due not least to the recession and to bad debts and also to the inflexibility of their property in being able to act as security for them to raise finance. That resulted in the company going into terminal decline.

Ironically, Union Railways—despite representations that I made at the time—would not come to an arrangement, because of the varied financial difficulties to which the company's own blight had contributed. As a result, the business has collapsed. Mr. Smith and his young family now exist on income support, with considerable debts around their necks. In both these cases, the families stood on their own feet and created small businesses of their own. They have been ruthlessly bulldozed on to the scrapheap by a massive national project—one could call it a pan-European project.

Because this is a novel project—it is the first major new railway in this country for more than 100 years—and because it is unprecedented in this century, the House has not made provision for cases such as this, which have had disastrous consequences for those two families. Two reports have been published on the side effects of the project—the ombudsman's report on the channel tunnel rail link and blight and the Select Committee's report on the rail link and exceptional hardship. The latter report states that it should be possible to distinguish a small number of cases of exceptional hardship.

In the two cases to which I have referred, it has been calculated that Mr. and Mrs. Winzar lost £450,000 between the forfeited house and incurred debts, while Mr. and Mrs. Smith lost some £235,000 on their home, plus a considerable sum in terms of their destroyed business. The House should look at the value of domestic properties for which provision is made for compensation and the total of their loss—including the debts incurred and the equity the families had in their businesses—and see that compensation is given.

Debates on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill in the House and on the channel tunnel rail link itself over many years have made it quite clear that there is an overwhelming majority on both sides of the House for the channel tunnel rail link project. So be it. If there is to be such a project, the full costs should be financed by the promoters—who are shortly to be identified—and even, if necessary, by the taxpayer if the House thinks that this is an excellent project. The House is not entitled to finance a massive project effectively at the expense of small householders and small business men who just have the immense bad luck to find that their properties are located in the direct path of the channel tunnel rail link.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister and the whole House to find very rapid means to compensate my constituents. They are entitled to look to us for compensation that would allow them to rebuild their shattered lives, and enable them to bring back a semblance of normality and earn a living.

10.38 pm

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) for bringing this important matter to the attention of the House and for the eloquence and conviction with which he has presented the problems of his constituents, with which, I am sure, the whole House will have sympathy. I appreciate the concerns of property owners and businesses who are affected by major infrastructure projects such as the proposed channel tunnel rail link. Blight and compensation are difficult matters that have occupied the House to a considerable extent.

Parliament's most recent substantive consideration of the general law regarding compensation and blight was, of course, during the passage of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991. As my hon. Friend is aware, generic issues such as compensation and blight are currently being considered by the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill Select Committee. The Committee has received a large number of petitions and has heard a great deal of evidence on the issues, including the representations made by my hon. Friend's constituents, that are the subject of tonight's debate.

The Committee will, of course, reach and announce its decisions on generic issues in relation to the Bill in due course. In what I have to say about the specific cases raised by my hon. Friend, I do not wish in any way to pre-empt the recommendations of the Committee or the decisions we shall reach in relation to those recommendations.

I fully understand my hon. Friend's particular concern about the difficulties faced by his constituents, Mr. and Mrs. Winzar and Mr. and Mrs. Smith. Although not identical, both cases involve failures of businesses with loans secured on properties affected by the channel tunnel rail link project. I understand that the difficulties arose during the period of generalised blight affecting the project. I shall say more about that and the current position on the investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration in a moment. It has, however, been the policy of successive Governments not to remedy generalised blight.

Once the rail link route was safeguarded, the properties of my hon. Friend's constituents became eligible for voluntary purchase within the terms of the national compensation code. Again, I shall say more about the voluntary purchase scheme operated by Union Railways Ltd. later, if time permits. I believe, however, that Union Railways has made every reasonable effort to help Mr. and Mrs. Winzar and Mr. and Mrs. Smith through their difficulties, within the scope of current compensation arrangements.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: My hon. Friend's reference to generalised blight is accurate. However, if the blight is caused by plans, written on maps, which involve going

[Mr. Jacques Arnold]

straight through people's houses, although the blight is generalised, it is specific and lethal for the people concerned.

Mr. Watts: I acknowledge the force of my hon. Friend's point. He will understand, however, that there has always been a distinction between generalised blight, which arises before a project has been defined and a route has been safeguarded, and the situation once a route has been safeguarded, which triggers the statutory provisions that the House has enacted.

Looking at the cases in a little more detail, I understand that Mr. and Mrs. Winzar purchased their property in 1990. It is very close to, but not on, the line of the proposed rail link route. However, the property has been included in the limits of deviation for the scheme and has been safeguarded because, in the opinion of Union Railways, construction of the new line would make living in the property intolerable.

In accordance with the national compensation code, Union Railways therefore offered to buy the property at the market value it would have enjoyed if the rail link proposal did not exist—that is, the unblighted value of the property. It also offered a home loss payment and disturbance costs, with payment of Mr. and Mrs. Winzar's reasonable legal and agents' fees. Unfortunately, the total offer made by Union Railways proved insufficient to cover the mortgage and loans on the property raised in relation to the business. As the price offered to Mr. and Mrs. Winzar reflects the unblighted value, any loss in value since the property was bought in 1990 reflects a general fall in house prices since that date, and not the effects of the scheme.

I understand that Union Railways has offered to go to arbitration over the valuation, and to pay the initial costs of it. It has also proposed that Mr. and Mrs. Winzar should be free to come back on a new valuation date at any time if they wish to withdraw from arbitration. In addition, the company has agreed to an extended completion period limited to 12 months as a protection against the property market falling. Completion could still be on the basis of the valuation at the time of purchase so that any rise in the property market would benefit Mr. and Mrs. Winzar.

Mr. and Mrs. Smith are in a similar but not identical position. I understand that they bought their property in 1987 and remortgaged it in 1989 to finance an expansion of their business. It is on the line of the proposed rail link and therefore became eligible for purchase under Union Railways' voluntary purchase scheme as soon as the route was safeguarded.

Again, Union Railways offered Mr. and Mrs. Smith the unblighted market value of their property and other payments in accordance with the national compensation code. It has also offered arbitration and to pay the costs of it, together with the possibility of Mr. and Mrs. Smith withdrawing from arbitration and recommencing within 12 months, in the hope that a rise in the housing market would benefit them.

Finally, Union Railways has offered to allow Mr. and Mrs. Smith to continue to occupy the property for a fixed period on payment of a rent which would effectively be deducted from the completion price. It has not been prepared, however, to allow Mr. and Mrs. Smith to continue to occupy the property rent-free.

Subject to agreeing valuations, the offers made by Union Railways would leave my hon. Friend's constituents in no worse a position than they would have been had they sought to sell in the absence of the rail link. Indeed, they would get the benefit of additional payments under the national compensation code—home loss payments, disturbance costs and legal and agents' fees.

Mr. Arnold: Will my hon. Friend clarify one point? Were my constituents to come to a settlement over the domestic properties, would it prejudice their rights to subsequent compensation in respect of the losses to their businesses that arose directly out of the blight?

Mr. Watts: I can reassure my hon. Friend that, if his constituents agreed terms of compensation within the provisions which are available now, and if, as a result of the further work which we are undertaking and on which we will consult with the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, we are able to agree and implement a scheme to provide compensation in circumstances of extreme hardship such as the Parliamentary Commissioner and the Select Committee described, and if Mr. and Mrs. Winzar and Mr. and Mrs. Smith were eligible to be considered under the terms of such a scheme, their right to be considered would not be prejudiced by the fact that they had agreed to the purchase on the basis which is currently being offered to them. I hope that that is a reassurance to my hon. Friend and his constituents.

To ensure that no avenue has been overlooked, I shall also ask Union Railways to look again at these two cases to see whether there is anything further that can be done within the voluntary purchase scheme and the national compensation code.

I shall now deal with the general question of the blight effects on and compensation arrangements for properties and businesses during the various phases of the channel tunnel rail link project.

In common with all major infrastructure projects, the rail link project was subject to what is described as generalised blight, which is the blight that may arise in the early stages of a project while options are being examined and worked up, and consultation is taking place. It ceases at the point at which a project becomes sufficiently well defined for the expected land requirements to be identified on a plan and safeguarded from development.

It has been the policy of successive Governments that there should be no remedy for generalised blight, and it is significant that Parliament did not take the opportunity to decide that generalised blight should give rise to compensation during the passage of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991.

The House is aware of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration's report on the channel tunnel rail link and blight, which relates to the generalised blight phase of the rail link project. I was grateful for the opportunity to inform the House of the current position on that report, and on the subsequent report of the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration about the channel tunnel rail link and exceptional hardship, during the debate initiated by my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) on 14 December.

On this occasion, I simply reiterate that, in the response to the Select Committee given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport on 1 November, the

Government concluded that they had to continue to resist the Parliamentary Commissioner's finding of maladministration in this case, and that any new principle of administration implied in the Committee's report was unacceptable, but that the Government were prepared to consider afresh whether a scheme might be formulated to implement the Committee's recommendation that redress should be granted to those affected to an extreme and exceptional degree by generalised blight from the channel tunnel rail link during the period June 1990 to April 1994, and how such a scheme might operate.

The Government agreed to look again at the possibility of a compensation scheme out of respect for the Select Committee and the office of the Parliamentary Commissioner, and without admission of fault or liability. We also made it clear that the Government would have to consider seriously the possible costs of such a scheme, which cannot yet be established, and that we could not make an open-ended commitment on an uncosted basis, in view of the Government's responsibilities to the taxpayer.

I know that hon. Members and their constituents are keen to know as quickly as possible the outcome of our consideration of whether such a scheme might be formulated. However, at this stage I have nothing substantive to report since the debate on 14 December, except to say that we will make as speedy progress as we can, taking account of the Government's undertaking to consult the Select Committee as proposals are developed and the need to consider seriously the costs of the scheme.

There are many important factors to be looked at, including an acceptable definition of extreme and exceptional hardship, the basis on which any compensation might be paid, the scope of any scheme and its practical operation, and the likely cost of administering any scheme and of compensation to be paid. Until the process of fresh consideration is completed, it is not possible to say whether or what new compensation arrangements might apply or to know whether Mr. and Mrs. Winzar and Mr. and Mrs. Smith might benefit from any such arrangements. I have already assured my hon. Friend and the House that any eligibility that they have to be considered under the terms of such a scheme would not be prejudiced by their earlier agreement of terms for the purchase of their properties under the arrangements that are currently in place.

As with all major infrastructure projects, compensation arising from the rail link is calculated in accordance with the national compensation code. In the case of the rail link, statutory powers for property purchase will not exist until enactment of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill.

However, since the route was announced and safeguarded in 1994, Union Railways Ltd. has been operating a voluntary purchase scheme which mirrors the statutory arrangements. All the properties that are within the surface safeguarded zone for the rail link qualify for voluntary purchase by Union Railways Ltd. on the same terms as under compulsory powers. The option of independent arbitration on valuation difficulties, through the President of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, also applies. The private sector promoter of the rail link project, when appointed, will be contractually obliged to continue the existing voluntary scheme until statutory powers are available.

For residential owner-occupied properties which are outside the surface safeguarded areas and which are not required for the construction of the railway, Union Railways Ltd. is operating a separate discretionary purchase scheme. Hon. Members will be aware that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris), announced on 19 July the publication of new guidelines for the Union Railways scheme, while announcing new guidelines to be used by the Highways Agency in its consideration of applications for discretionary purchase of property in respect of road schemes. The intention was to ensure that both sets of guidelines were broadly comparable.

The main features of the scheme are that applicants must have a qualifying interest in the property, which must not have been bought with foreknowledge of the rail link project; the enjoyment of the property must be likely to be seriously affected by the construction or use of the rail link; the property owner must provide evidence that he or she has made reasonable efforts to sell at a realistic market price; there must be a pressing need to move, for example as a result of financial pressures, medical conditions or employment elsewhere; and purchase is at the discretion of Union Railways Ltd., which will not normally purchase unless a property is seriously affected by both diminution in value and noise.

When purchase is agreed under the discretionary arrangements, it is at the full market price unaffected by the project. Again, the private sector promoter of the rail link project will be required contractually to continue the discretionary purchase scheme until one year after the rail link opens, at which point the provisions of the Land Compensation Act 1973 will apply.

Under part I of that Act, any loss of value of homes caused by the physical effects of the new rail link in operation may qualify for compensation. This is a statutory right which will be claimable 12 months after the rail link comes into operation.

In conclusion, I again commend my hon. Friend for raising the question of blight and compensation arising from the rail link generally, and for drawing attention to the specific problems of his constituents. I hope that my comments will have given him some little assurance.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seven minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 10 January 1996

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Coalfield Communities

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

9.34 am

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): I am extremely grateful for this debate about the regeneration of the coalfield communities. This is the first Wednesday debate of the new year, which is a time for reflection and recollection—a time to draw lessons from the past but also to tackle the coming year with new hope and resolution. That is what the coalfield communities are doing. It is also what they were doing three years ago.

The House will recall that in October 1992 the then President of the Board of Trade announced the closure of 31 of Britain's 50 collieries. That decision was taken away for reflection and reconsideration, and in May 1993 the review was finalised, with consequences that are now plain to see: massive job losses in the coal industry and many collieries closed.

I have a new year's resolution of my own, which is not to alienate my colleagues. I know that members of the miners group are to meet my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) at 10.30 this morning—I am sure that they too are tackling the new year with new resolution—so I shall be brief because I know that some of them want to contribute. Indeed, I hope that everyone connected with the coalfield communities will have a chance to speak this morning.

In Nottinghamshire, the consequences of the pit review are clear: six collieries have closed and 10,428 people who used to work in the coal industry have lost their jobs. Moreover, 4,100 people connected with the secondary industries have also lost their jobs, and there has been a loss of spending power in the local economy of £550 million a year—a significant amount.

Unemployment in Nottinghamshire is still unacceptably high and there is real deprivation. To be sure, unemployment has fallen, but I urge the Minister to look closely at the figures. In October 1992 unemployment in Nottinghamshire stood at about the national average. Now it is above it, and in certain pockets unemployment has risen against the trend. I am sure that some of my colleagues will mention the fact that unemployment in the coalfield communities is understated. I have looked carefully at a report by Sheffield Hallam university which suggests that male unemployment in the coalfield areas is in the region of 20 to 35 per cent. That compares with the national norm of 15 per cent., calculated on the same basis.

Even more significant is a comparison between national unemployment figures since October 1992 and unemployment in coalfield travel-to-work areas. Since October 1992, national unemployment has fallen by 17 per cent. In the Mansfield travel-to-work area over the same period, the percentage decrease has been just 7.1. In the Worksop travel-to-work area—another coalfield area—unemployment has fallen by less than 1 per cent.

So unemployment may be falling generally, but the rates differ according to area and the gap between the rich and the poor appears to be growing. The Government were aware that those problems would occur and in their announcement they offered an aid package worth £200 million over three years. I calculate that £30 million of that came to Nottinghamshire.

The first question that I want to ask the Minister is what research has been undertaken on that aid package's effects. I have heard him and his colleagues talk about inputs into coalfield communities. Three years on from the closure announcement, we should consider some performance and output measures. How far has that £200 million changed things in coalfield communities? I suspect that no research has been undertaken and that the reason for that is that the aid package was known to be inadequate at the beginning. It is short term—it will end during this calendar year. There is a scatter-gun approach—a shot at lots of moving targets, but no real strategy. There has been little co-ordination of that package.

I want to consider some of the measures, including enterprise zones. I hope that the Minister will visit the three enterprise zones in Nottinghamshire, announced more than three years ago. Not one brick has been laid on any of those zones and, three years on, not one new job has been created. That is the measure of the success of the Government aid package. That is the position in Nottinghamshire, but the figures are similar throughout the country.

I want the Minister to recall our debates, especially those on the Coal Industry Bill, when a number of us pressed the Government hard on what was to happen to British Coal's non-operational land, where there is a basis to create new jobs and which could be a cornerstone for new development land. Very little has happened. As the Minister knows, the Environment Act 1995 went through the House last year. That transfers liabilities for derelict land on to new owners. British Coal has been set different priorities. It has been told not only to dispose of the land and to create new jobs, but, clearly under section 11 of the Act, to get the best price and value for the land and to dispose of the liabilities.

I understand that almost 80 sites were to be transferred to English Partnerships, the regeneration agency, to create new jobs in England. Three years on, that land has not been transferred. Strong discussions are taking place between British Coal and English Partnerships about who is responsible for the dereliction and who will clear up the liabilities. Clearly, English Partnerships would like to take the land, but it is not prepared to pick up an unlimited liability. If the Minister wants to help coalfield communities, he could intervene in that discussion and ensure that that land comes on to the market straight away.

Smaller schemes that would lift the landscape and enhance the environment are also being held up. The county council in Nottinghamshire would like to acquire

[Mr. Paddy Tipping]

six former colliery tips from British Coal. Discussions are well advanced. The Forestry Commission would plant the sites and take responsibility. We could create a new Sherwood forest that would lift the landscape, yet the deal is stuck because there are questions about who is responsible for the liabilities. We want the landscape to be lifted and to see change, but because of arguments about liabilities, that deal too is stuck.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): My hon. Friend touched on a point about the environment and the landscape. I know that the same is happening in Northumberland and parts of Durham. On the landscape, we have seen nothing but opencast mining. All the deep mines have closed, all the jobs have been lost and, all over the place, there have been a load of planning applications for opencast mining, which is a blot on the land.

Mr. Tipping: It is clear that opencasting can be a blot on the landscape. It should be allowed only where there is local support and where it will lead to environmental improvement. The problem with opencasting is that people want to make a profit out of it and that the profit is to be made out of big green-field sites. That again leads to further dereliction in coalfield communities.

Ms Hilary Armstrong (North-West Durham): I am sorry to intervene, but the issues that my hon. Friend is talking about especially affect regions such as mine, where the mines have been closed for well over 20 years and where, in response to Durham county council's inquiries, developers have identified, in my constituency alone, almost 40 potential opencast sites. If those sites go ahead, and even if they do not, with current policy, there will be a blight not just on people's living environment, but on the attempts of both the public and private sectors to attract new industry that will grow in the community for years to come.

Despite the fact that it has been 20 years since the pits closed, we still have an enormous task to bring jobs that will give the region a future. We have the blight of opencast, on top of the amazing problems that we had early on from dereliction, although the landscape in our county is now green and beautiful. To see it destroyed again would be a dreadful indictment of Government policy.

Mr. Tipping: My hon. Friend makes two important points. First, we do not want planning blight in coalfield communities. People have lived with dereliction; they now aspire to something better. Secondly, she makes a strong point that the regeneration of coalfield communities will not be brought about by a three-year aid package, which is short term and limited; as she says, the process will last for 20 years or perhaps longer. It is certainly a generational thing.

As well as derelict land, there is a problem involving organisations such as the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation. During the passage of the Coal Industry Act 1992, we were promised that CISWO-associated recreation and community land would be transferred to CISWO and to the National Playing Fields Association. I know that there have been considerable discussions about that, but three years on, that package has yet to be delivered.

Again, the issue involves the liabilities. Both CISWO and the NPFA are charities. They have been advised by the Charity Commission not to take on land where there is a liability. Those recreational lands and sports fields are important for coalfield communities. Again, this issue needs to be unlocked quickly.

English Partnerships aspires to take on 80 sites from British Coal. They may be the best sites. It is also responsible for distributing derelict land grant. There is a feeling among some local authorities that, as the owner of sites and the distributor of grant, English Partnerships may focus derelict land grant on its own properties.

Local authorities have a long history of tackling urban decay and derelict sites. They seek assurances that derelict land grant will continue to be available to them. They do not want to be in a position where they have acquired derelict land and where they and their council tax payers become responsible for the liability. They are happy to work in partnerships—they have done so for years—but they still want access to derelict land grant. I hope that the Minister will give those assurances.

I hope that the Minister will also give assurances to English Partnerships, which is chaired by Lord Walker, a man noted for intervention. His intervention with English Partnerships has perhaps been ineffective. I know that he has pressed hard for extra resources to tackle the tasks that are before the agency. I note that he has been unsuccessful in the Budget. Next year, English Partnerships' budget is to be cut by £7 million or 3 per cent. By the end of March 1999, its budget is to be cut by £26 million or 12 per cent. What hope does that provide for the coalfield communities in the new year? Can an assurance be given that such communities will be given priority by English Partnerships?

British Coal Enterprise is another economic development agency which has operated successfully in coalfield areas since 1984. It is the only agency which focuses entirely on coalfields. It is to be privatised on 31 March this year. While it has been in the public sector and can receive funds it has been a conduit for European funds. It has received £10 million from Europe. Will the Minister clarify whether there is a danger that once it is privatised that £10 million could be clawed back by the European Community?

Although I oppose the privatisation of British Coal Enterprise, I also seek an assurance that the sale proceeds—about £20 million—will be reinvested in the coalfield communities. Surely it is only right and equitable that the proceeds of the sale of an agency that has worked for the coalfields should be reinvested there. Perhaps the Minister will tell us the guidelines for the sale of British Coal Enterprise. Is it merely to be sold to the highest bidder, or will he ensure that the new private sector owner gives assurances that it will continue to focus on and give priority to the coalfield areas?

European funds, too, are important to coalfield communities. We are now two years into the RECHAR II programme and the current objective 2 programme. Despite that, money is not yet trickling through to projects in the Nottinghamshire coalfield or in other coalfield areas. Part of the reason for that is staff shortages. Let me draw the Minister's attention to the Government office for the east midlands—GOEM. I am not criticising the staff who work there because I know that civil service staffing

has been frozen for the past three years and that to the year 1998-99 there is to be a further 12 per cent. cut in civil servants.

Letters have been sent from the Government office to local authorities asking for local authority staff to be seconded to the Government office to deal with grant applications. In fact, it is even worse than that. I have in my possession letters from temporary staff at the Government office in Nottingham who have written to local authorities saying that their contract is nearly up. They have worked at that office for two years and are about to be entitled to full employment rights at the office, but they are to be laid off. They are asking Nottinghamshire county council to employ them and second them back to the Government office. That is short-termism in the extreme. A total of £30 million of European money could be drawn into the Nottinghamshire coalfield, but the Government are not prepared to pick up the bill to fund the civil servants necessary to bring that money in. In essence, that is my complaint. We have a short-term solution from the Government for a long-term process that will not be resolved easily.

One of the interesting things about the Budget was the way in which capital spending was slashed. The Minister, with his knowledge of local authority spending, will understand that capital investment is long-term investment. It produces value and resources over a period of time. I believe strongly that if we are to invest in coalfield communities, we must invest in capital projects. I draw the Minister's attention to the Robin Hood railway line in Nottinghamshire. I am delighted that the line, which will connect Nottingham to Worksop and run through the Nottinghamshire coalfield, has been funded by the Government. An announcement of a new tranche of money was made only this week. However, I remind the Minister that in May 1993 the then Secretary of State, speaking to the Nottinghamshire chamber of commerce, promised that Government money would be available to complete the line. We are now three years on and the line still has not been built. It would be a recognition of an approach to the coalfield if that money was forthcoming.

I am keen to see a road to recovery in Nottinghamshire. I want to see a road that links the M1 and the A1 and which runs through the Nottinghamshire coalfield opening up new development sites. That is a widely perceived view in the coalfield and I am extremely disappointed that the first leg of it, the Rainworth bypass, was refused funding in the transport policy and programme announced before Christmas. The lack of funding for that bypass means that the southern and western bypasses in Mansfield, also essential to the recovery, will not be completed before the 21st century. Investment in infrastructure is an essential part of coalfield recovery.

Let me remind the Minister about the former British Coal housing stock which was transferred to housing associations. There are pockets of such housing throughout the coalfields. There are 2,000 former British Coal houses in housing association ownership in Nottinghamshire. They are in a deplorable condition and need renovation and refurbishment. Will the Minister lift the embargo that was put on the Housing Corporation to provide grant to refurbish those properties? That would help to regenerate those communities.

I remind the Minister also about the National Mining museum in Yorkshire which was given national status fairly recently. That museum received a great deal of help from British Coal but when that was no longer forthcoming, Government grant was made available for three years to continue the museum. That grant has nearly expired and the museum faces serious challenges. It is looking to the national lottery to survive and expand, but it will take a change in the rules and criteria if it is to be eligible. Our heritage is as important as our future and I hope that the Minister will look closely at that issue.

People who live and work in coalfield communities are pragmatic, hard-working and resilient. They can take bad news but they cannot take uncertainty. They have had a series of bad knocks over the past decade, but despite that, they are still working for a better future. What characterises coalfield communities is that parents want better for their children.

All over the coalfields people are working for change. The Ollerton and district employment forum has come together in a private-public sector partnership which has had some success with the Ollerton pit site and the Boughton pumping station. In Bilsthorpe local people have got together to form CHUBB, which is a resource centre for the community and the unemployed. Its future is blighted by the lack of money from the European social fund. In Newstead residents are working together to refurbish the housing stock and regenerate the village. Change will happen; it is inevitable, but it is a long-term process.

Last autumn the North Nottinghamshire training and enterprise council produced its evaluation of its coalfield action plan. It demonstrates success but also highlights some failures. I hope that the Minister has had an opportunity to look at it. It concludes that while much has been achieved, much more needs to be done.

Mining communities and the mining industry, in Nottinghamshire and across the country, feel betrayed by a Government who simply walked away from the promises they made to Notts miners. The Government cannot similarly walk away from the coalfield communities. It is not sufficient to make short-term investment over three years. The TEC's evaluation is that new resources, new strategies and renewed partnerships are needed for many years to come.

It is essential to invest in coalfield communities. They need better than they have now. We should be supporting them and investing in their future.

10 am

Sir Jim Lester (Broxtowe): I apologise for the fact that I have to attend a Select Committee meeting this morning. I shall, therefore, speak only briefly and, unfortunately, will not be present for the Front-Bench speeches.

I welcome the debate on the Nottinghamshire coalfield communities and thank the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) for initiating it. He asked some pertinent questions which I am sure my hon. Friend the Minister will answer.

We all support the hon. Gentleman's new year resolution to make regeneration the watchword for our local society, but despite what he said, and for the very special reasons that anyone born and bred in Nottinghamshire understands, I cannot think of any other industry going through a period of change that has had the same individual and community support as the coal industry. No other industry that has gone through decline

[Sir Jim Lester]

and change—for example, the textile industry—has had anything like the support that has been given to the coal industry.

I made my maiden speech from a spot not far from the place where the hon. Member for Sherwood is now sitting. It was in February 1974, when there were two coal mines in my constituency—Moor Green, famous for all that D. H. Lawrence wrote about it, and Babbington, which became famous in 1984 for a rather less pleasant reason. Both mines were worked out; neither was closed because of recent decisions. Although the mines have been worked out, many miners still live in my constituency. Many of them have transferred to different pits. Indeed, as the hon. Gentleman said, they have shown great resilience in moving from pit to pit to stay in work.

Now, my principal connection with the coal industry is resisting the development of an opencast site at Shortwood farm—a green-field site—because of all the problems that it would create. My hon. Friend the Minister has already had an opportunity to look at the site. Although I understand that he cannot comment on it today, he has shown that he understands what it would be like to watch a green-field site being dug up for the next 10 to 20 years.

I hope that the hon. Member for Sherwood will welcome the Eastwood Phoenix project in our constituencies and that of the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon). It is a new departure in coalfield regeneration. Eastwood, too, is famous for its connection with D. H. Lawrence. It is not in decline as a result of changes in the coal industry, but it is stagnant. The project, introduced by Broxtowe borough council and enthusiastically supported by me, has been accepted by the Government because it aims to prevent decline, regenerate Eastwood and help it to remain a market town for the community around it.

I warmly welcome the regeneration of the Moor Green site in my constituency, where new factory units providing employment for miners and other people in the area are being developed. We must recognise that careful analysis of the problems, which were mentioned by the hon. Member for Sherwood, followed by correct action at the right time and in the right place, is the way to regenerate and prevent decline in areas that once depended totally on a vital coal industry.

10.4 am

Mr. John Cummings (Easington): Other hon. Members have used a broad-brush approach when speaking about the demise of coalfield communities. I want to focus specifically on Easington colliery—the last colliery in the Durham coalfield to close. It lies in the north-east of the Easington district, which has a population of 98,000 people. The area has been devastated by the demise of an industry which in 1951 employed 81,000 people in the county.

In the Easington district alone, more than 10,000 jobs were lost between 1984 and 1993, and it is estimated that a further 10,000 were lost in related industries. The appalling levels of economic, social and environmental deprivation, which derive from the area's former dependence on the coal industry, are shown in statistics that make rather gruesome reading. They come from a document prepared by Easington district council for Easington colliery's rural challenge submission.

Unemployment stands at 14 per cent. The rate for men is 21 per cent., almost one third of whom are categorised as long-term unemployed. That figure does not include the more than 12,000 people who are on long-term sickness benefit after spending a lifetime in heavy industry. Easington is the third poorest district in the country in terms of average disposable income. It is worth reflecting on the fact that new jobs coming into the area pay only between £2 and £3.50 an hour.

Easington has the 19th highest standard mortality rate in the country, some 47 per cent. above the national average. Life expectancy is three years below the national average. Less than half of households own a car. About 41 per cent. of households have a resident with chronic illness. Between 1971 and 1991, the district lost about 11 per cent. of its population. The percentage of youngsters staying on at school is the third lowest in the country. More than 200 hectares of land is derelict.

As I said, Easington was the last colliery in the Durham coalfield to close. It has a population of just over 5,000. It was and is a typical pit village. It was built under the shadow of the pit pulley wheels and was closely associated with the pit head and buildings. Not surprisingly, its problems mirror those of the whole district. When I talk about Easington, I could be talking about any of the former coal mining villages in the district, which once numbered 13.

Where information is available at ward level, the signs are that the problems are somewhat worse than I have described. For example, population loss between 1971 and 1991 was considerably higher at 20 per cent.; car ownership levels are lower and the main economic activity rates are the sixth lowest in the county. As in all colliery villages, the colliery was the centre of economic and community life—at Easington, it was so for more than 100 years. The colliery provided not only jobs but leisure, social facilities and housing. It nurtured a collective sense of identity which made it a community in the real sense of the word.

With the demise of the colliery, many hundreds of colliery houses have been left to God and good neighbours. Several housing associations, acting quite responsibly, have moved into the area and spent a considerable amount of money, but their efforts are being frustrated by individuals and companies who have also moved into the area—to gain some form of tax relief. They have no intention whatever of underpinning the real investment of the housing associations. That matter will have to be addressed in the colliery village of Easington.

When the colliery closed in December 1993, with the loss of 1,400 jobs, it marked the end of an industrial era for the county and the start of a search for a new and exciting future, but the Minister did not accept the rural challenge submission and we have fallen at the first hurdle. Perhaps the system of bids for rural challenge development and the single regeneration budget 2 should be re-examined. It is run on a competitive basis, but the problems in Easington ought not to be left to chance or, indeed, a form of national lottery.

Too many of the problems faced by the local community are inextricably linked to the demise of the coal mining industry, which has left a legacy throughout

the district, and especially in Easington, of economic, social and environmental problems. I have mentioned high unemployment. No fewer than 77 per cent. of all jobs in Easington colliery were lost when the pit closed. There is a very poor and limited range of alternative employment opportunities. Due to the mining culture and the colliery's dominance of the local economy, there is a lack of an enterprise culture. The long-standing dependency on the pit has meant that there is no local post-16 education or training facilities in the colliery village. We have very low levels of educational achievement. There is a mismatch between the skills of the work force and the needs of local and regional employers—and, indeed, employers who are considering coming into the area.

We have a very high and continually rising crime rate, an increase in the fear of crime, a very high incidence of substance abuse among young people, a lack of facilities, especially for young adults, and poor and declining health standards. Colliery housing is in very poor condition, there is a lack of suitable accommodation for the young and the elderly and there has been no private sector development for new housing for the past 40 years. All of those problems emanate from the village's dependency on the pit, the colliery and the National Coal Board.

In the colliery village of Easington, there are 27 hectares of derelict colliery site. Despoiled beaches are a product of colliery waste tipping. In excess of 1.5 million tonnes of solid waste was dumped along the coastline each year. Thankfully, the bid submitted to the millennium fund has been successful and we hope to tackle the problems on the beaches, but are we to be left with beautiful beaches crowned with derelict housing, housing in need of renewal and derelict cliff sites? One does not equate to the other.

The coal mining industry sustained the village economically and socially, but it bred a culture of dependency that stifled enterprise and exacted an enormous price in environmental and health terms. I well remember talking to my illustrious predecessor, Manny Shinwell, on becoming involved with the Labour party at the beginning of the 1960s. I said, "Manny, why have we no car industry in Easington? Why have we no real manufacturing base in Easington?" The answer was quite simple. He said, "As long as the nation requires coal and as long as the people of Easington are there to dig coal for the use of the nation, you will never ever have attractive manufacturing industry in the district of Easington. Coal miners would undoubtedly leave the mines to work in a more attractive environment if they could." The cards have always been stacked against us in coalfield communities.

In the light of the problems that I have just outlined, there might be an inclination among Ministers and Departments to write off Easington village as a viable entity. None the less the community consultation workshops have proved that, although the village might have lost a sense of identity, it has retained its self-esteem and its dignity. There is a growing feeling of optimism in Easington colliery community, which requires and looks forward to positive change. A local community-led generation partnership, which has a clear vision of the future, has been established.

I have mentioned the down side of Easington colliery and district, but it has many physical attributes that could be exploited if Ministers and Departments would only take note. I invite the Minister to visit the area at any time. It lies in a very pleasant rural setting on the coastline—the only coastline in County Durham. There is easy access to the coast, where improvements are being pursued with the help of the millennium fund. Areas of open space could be used by the community and, indeed, industry. There is good access to the A19, an east coast railway, a major road network and it is very close to centres of employment on Tyneside, Wearside and Teesside.

The problems are such that demands on all of those resources are extremely high. Competition is strong and there is much emphasis on gap funding. Notwithstanding the laudable efforts to reverse the decline in the village to date, on-going initiatives are disjointed and inadequate, and the rural challenge scheme might have provided the key to overcome some of those difficulties.

Only towards the end of December did the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration come to Easington and designate six enterprise zones, for which we are extremely grateful. We are looking forward to those enterprise zones being filled very quickly with new, exciting and modern firms. However, may I draw the Minister's attention to an anomaly? The link road proposed to feed the Fox Cover site from the A19 has not been accepted by the Department of Transport. That enterprise zone will therefore have no real link with any major means of communication. No doubt the Minister will hear more about the matter in due course. Nevertheless, we are extremely pleased that the enterprise zones have been designated.

The single regeneration budget 2 bid has also failed recently. Are Ministers really serious about regenerating mining areas? I remember the Minister's colleagues in the then Department of Energy repeatedly painting a rosy picture of the situation and saying that regenerating coal mining areas through a range of approaches would be emphasised, but not one penny piece has been spent in Easington, or indeed—perhaps—anywhere else in the country. The people in coalfield communities are looking to the future. We have established a superb working relationship with English Partnerships, and we hope that great things will come from it in the not too distant future.

I must tell the Minister that the issues are too important to be dealt with through competitive bidding. Why not give a little back to Easington, which has served the nation so well over the past 100 years? I remind the Minister of the awful tragedy of the Easington colliery disaster in 1951. The community of Easington has paid in blood, sweat and tears. The Government should respond accordingly to the needs of that community. I await some positive response because it is now time for the nation to recognise that we have served it well and to give us back a little bit so that we can help ourselves.

Easington is undergoing a period of traumatic adjustment. We are searching for a new role, image and function. The village faces a considerable task if the transition from a working pit settlement to a thriving rural village is to be achieved. I am sure that, by virtue of our resilience and optimism, which is founded on our collective sense of identity, we will rise to the challenge. We look to the Minister to fulfil his obligations and his colleagues' promises to achieve that transition.

10.21 am

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I am very pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) was able to put coalfield regeneration on the agenda.

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

The idea of regenerating the coalfield communities was proposed three years ago, after the Government's closure of the 31 collieries—it was mainly talk on their part. The initial statement was made in October 1992, when the former President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—now the Deputy Prime Minister—was keen to tell everybody, including hon. Members, not to worry about the 31 closed pits because the Government were to institute schemes to enable people to find work, and that everything in the garden would be rosy.

Three years later, we are participating in a debate in which my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood has listed the lack of achievement. He comes from an area that most people in Britain—certainly those in the coalfields—recognise as one of the most prosperous among those represented by the National Union of Mineworkers. Nottingham has always had not only the attraction of the pits, but several large firms such as Boots, Plessey, Players and Raleigh. People moved out of the pits and into some of those industries when the money in the pits was bad. Now they do not even have that chance.

The Government do not properly understand that the situation has changed. When the pits were closed in the 1950s and 1960s, people in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood were able either to transfer to another pit or to go to one of the large firms in and around that coalfield. The situation is much bleaker now because they can no longer move into expanding firms and there are hardly any pits to work in.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right when he talks about the unemployment figures being understated. The Government have never taken into account the fact that those over 55 who received the make-up money from the Department of Energy are not included in the unemployment statistics. We can reckon that about 100,000 ex-miners have not been included in the unemployment statistics for the very reason that they took part in that compensation scheme when their collieries were closed. That is why male unemployment in many pit villages, certainly in my constituency, is as high as 50 per cent. Counts have been made in Shirebrook and surrounding areas to prove that.

One would have thought that, in the aftermath of the massive pit closures, there being no employment prospects, the first thing that the Government would have done would have been to tell the Department of the Environment, which made up the budgets for local authorities, that a little extra should be put in for the coalfield areas, especially given what their spokesmen said from time to time about giving those areas a lift. They have never done that. By and large, the standard spending assessment of councils in coalfield areas, including the one that my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood spoke about, has not improved—in many cases it has gone down.

My hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) is almost certainly to be in government shortly—in view of all the Conservatives who are transferring to the Opposition Benches, that might happen sooner rather than later—so I am not just speaking to the Minister. When my right hon. and hon. Friends form their Government, I want them to accept that the SSA and the grant paid to local authorities in deprived areas that have been hit massively by unemployment must be adjusted so that we can regenerate them much more speedily.

Why have the Government not tried some sort of pilot scheme for housing redevelopment in the coalfield communities when that idea has been foremost in our minds? We know that, according to their policy, they allow local authorities to build hardly any houses—at the last count, 1,750 were built in a full year. The Government could have encouraged local authorities to build housing in those areas where unemployment is high. That matter should also be addressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras.

It is important to have this debate because my hon. Friend can then go back to the leader of the Labour party, soon to be the Prime Minister, and tell him that the people in the coalfields want a stake in society and they want it to be sirloin. That is what we are asking for. We want to readdress the local problems.

I am not making a case for preferential treatment; I just recall what happened in the 1960s when we had a Labour Government. I remember as a local authority councillor when my own colliery, Parkhouse, near Clay Cross, closed down. I went down to see the then Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), along with Tom Swain, my Member of Parliament. We wanted some additional help to redress the balance that had been upset by the pit closure. Many miners simply transferred to other pits, but for those who did not, we wanted to set up a scheme to assist the Erewash valley, which included several local authorities running between the borders of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire.

My right hon. Friend granted special assistance to the area with the result that, when Parkhouse colliery was closed, the Clay Cross councillors were able to announce that we had managed to obtain discretionary grants. As a result, 700 people walked down the same pit lane that used to lead to Parkhouse colliery and went instead into a factory, Ashton Containers, and several other new factories on that site. That is how it was done in the 1960s. I want to impress on the Government and my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras that it is not impossible to overcome the problems of the coalfields with regional assistance. We did just that in the 1960s to offset the effects of pit closures.

My next point was not raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood, because he reduced what he might have said so that others could speak. We have heard a lot of talk about cleaning up the rivers in coalfield areas—in Durham, in Scotland and in every other part of the coalfields. For the past two years, we have heard people talk about rivers being filthy as a result of pit closures, as polluted water finally finds its way into the water courses.

Why is there not a big programme for cleaning up rivers, which would create some work? If the Government were bright enough, they would realise that, politically, it would be a smart thing to spend some money on, and would get rid of some of the unemployment problems at the same time. Much could be done in all the coalfield areas, but not enough has been done.

One thing is certain—I do not want the Minister or anybody else to tell me that opencast is a substitute for deep mines. We all know that opencast has a peripatetic

work force. Firms do not usually recruit locally because they bring most of their people with them. We do not want to hear any of those barmy suggestions about opencast creating employment in local areas.

That is not all. Opencast operators dig a big hole—they dig very deep holes now—take out the coal and leave the hole behind to be stuffed with all sorts of waste, possibly including nuclear waste if they can get away with it. There will certainly be lots of toxic waste. We do not want that "solution" to the problem. That is why, in Derbyshire, we have opposed opencast wherever possible. Not only can opencast not provide work but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood and others said, as a result of all the toxic waste being dumped in the holes, it might be counter-productive in terms of employment possibilities.

In my opinion, there is another reason why opencast must be opposed. We shall soon be in government. As I said earlier, people want a stake in society. We might want to reopen some of the 31 pits that were closed, but we shall never be able to do that if opencasting has taken place. We all know that opencast working creates instability in the surrounding ground, so we shall never be able to sink a mine where opencasting has taken place 300 ft down.

It is important that my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras understands that, as soon as Labour is returned to power, we must take the collieries back into public ownership and stop any proposed opencasting in those areas.

It is possible to reopen some of the pits. I do not claim that that would be easy where opencast mining has taken place—it would be almost impossible—but where there has been no opencast mining, many of the pits could be reopened. In the past, we did not think that that was possible, but after the miners' strike of 1984-85, when the pits had been closed for 12 months, although many of us had said that they would never be reopened, they were reopened. We found that it was possible to mine in the same places again. It is important to bear that in mind when we get back into government.

My remarks are addressed not only to the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, who will be on his bike at the next election, but to my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras. I apologise for the fact that I shall not be able to be here to listen to my hon. Friend's speech, but he knows that, in a few minutes, I am going to meet my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition to discuss such matters, and other things.

My hon. Friend must bear in mind the fact that we are talking about intervention in the economy. We cannot afford to let market forces operate any longer. In the 1960s we proved that it was possible to minimise the devastation caused by pit closures. We created work by intervening and directing firms here, there and everywhere. We shall need a growing economy, because we cannot direct firms if there is no movement. That must be at the top of the agenda.

I tell my hon. Friend and others that, when we get into power, we must remember that we are talking about jobs. The new Labour Government must understand that jobs are at the top of the agenda. When we have found that creating jobs is possible in some of the devastated coalfield communities, that will become the practice for everybody else too.

If the new Labour Government are searching for a big idea, they need look no further than to say that, if we get rid of the problems in the mining communities, that could set the pattern for all the other areas of high unemployment in Britain. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras will measure up to that task; in a few minutes, we shall ask the Leader of the Opposition to measure up to it, too.

10.35 am

Mr. Bill Etherington (Sunderland, North): It is always a great pleasure to be involved in any debate with my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). Unfortunately, today I have to follow him, which until now I have always managed to avoid by speaking before him.

I shall be relatively brief, as I wish to raise only one problem—a problem that will not go away, because it is becoming a war of attrition. I am talking about mine water pollution. At one time it seemed that that was mentioned almost every other day in the Chamber, but over recent months the front has gone relatively quiet. However, the problem has not gone away.

We have had vague promises from Ministers, but we need some firm commitments and a definite programme laid down. We need not platitudes but a proper framework to deal with the problem. A long-term problem requires a long-term strategy, and I am afraid that at the moment we do not have that.

I declare an interest in that I am sponsored by the National Union of Mineworkers. I also spent many hours in the Committee on the Coal Industry Act 1994, so I have quite a bit of knowledge about mine water pollution, which the Committee spent several days discussing. Unfortunately, we do not seem to be much further forward now, so I have some suggestions for the Minister.

The role of the Coal Authority should be clearly defined and put on to a statutory footing. There should be a commitment to and a preparation of a phased and effective programme of remedial work to prevent pollution from getting into our rivers and water supplies. In conjunction with that, the Coal Authority's funding should be maintained at the current level until such time as the problem has been fully evaluated and solved.

We would also like the water regulator to be required to carry out on a regular or rolling basis an audit of existing and potential incidents of pollution from abandoned mines. I do not like having to repeat myself, but sometimes one has to: the problem will not go away. Our beliefs were stated in the amendments that the Opposition tabled both to the Coal Industry Act 1994 and to the Environment Act 1995 when they were being considered by the House.

The Minister will be well aware that there have been many problems with the water supply in Yorkshire. I shall not go into those now, but he will also know that in the north-east we have recently had the twin problems of flooding and water shortage. So all is not well in the water industry. There are many problems ahead, and I hope that they will not be exacerbated by a lack of action to deal with potential pollution.

The issue is fairly simple when we get right down to it; the coalfield communities have suffered for many centuries in order to create wealth not only for themselves

[Mr. Bill Etherington]

but for the nation as a whole. But the nation as a whole did not suffer the problems caused by that creation of wealth. It would be totally immoral and utterly wrong if the coalfield communities had to pay for the pollution, through either council tax or water charges. The pollution was caused by work undertaken for the benefit of the nation as a whole. It should be paid for by the nation as a whole through the Government.

10.39 am

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): At the previous general election—particularly in the Nottinghamshire coalfield—Ministers promised that there would be a great future for the coal industry. That was in April 1992. But like a lot of other Tory promises, it proved to be worth not a light because, in October 1992, the present Deputy Prime Minister—the great one-nation Tory—announced 31 pit closures and the expected loss of 30,000 jobs. When he made that announcement, the right hon. Gentleman could not even be bothered to suggest any other way of employing the people who might lose their jobs.

The revulsion that the announcement caused throughout the country forced the Government to phase the closure programme, although they did not stop it. The Government promised help for the mining areas, but that help has been insufficient and slow in coming. As with much else that the Government do, they give with one hand in a publicised way while seeking to take things away with another. That has been their general approach to the coalfield communities.

When European money under the RECHAR programme was promised before the election, the Government tried to snaffle it from the coalfield communities to put into the general rate fund to reduce the poll tax and council tax liability in Tory places such as Westminster and Wandsworth, until the EC rightly insisted that the money was spent in the areas for which it was intended. Since then, the Government have kept up their approach. They have provided some help, but it has been inadequate and late and its benefits have been more than offset by the harm caused by coal privatisation.

As my hon. Friends have pointed out, there are high levels of unemployment, with between 30 per cent. and 50 per cent. male unemployment in some small communities. There have been massive reductions in the take-home pay of people who have other jobs—again, the figure is between 30 per cent. and 50 per cent. There has been a massive reduction in the number of people in the active population, and therefore there is economic decline as people have no money to pay out. Pubs are closing in mining areas.

There is an increasing threat to the environment, and there have been delays in the clearing up of dereliction. There has been pressure to increase opencasting and—as my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington) said—there has been a big increase in mine water pollution. There has also been a massive increase in crime—a 300 per cent. increase in three years in some of the areas affected by the closures. The Government must take some responsibility for that because, while there is no excuse for any young person turning to crime, a young person who sees the Government stealing his dad's job might think that stealing is the order of the day. Poor job prospects have undermined social cohesion. Parents who are out of work lose their authority over the rest of the family, leading to social break-up.

It is believed that the Government saved £200 million by the pit closures, and they got another £1 billion from the sale of the coal industry. The coalfield communities think that they ought to have that money, and why not? Their jobs and their work built up the assets which were sold. But they are not getting a prompt or sympathetic response from the Government, whose response has been characterised by incompetence, delay and a lack of interest.

One example of that is the establishment of enterprise zones. The Government's record in that area has shown that they have acted slower than a two-toed sloth. We were promised enterprise zones by the present Deputy Prime Minister more than three years ago when he announced the pit closure programme. The impression created was that there would be dozens of them, but we have ended up with three—one in the Derne valley, one in Mansfield and one in Easington.

The closures were announced in October 1992, but the Easington enterprise zone was designated in December last year—more than three years later. The Government have tried, as usual, to blame the European Commission, but the real cause of the delay was the coal industry privatisation. There was internal rowing between the Department of Trade and Industry, the Treasury and the Department of the Environment, because most enterprise zones had been based on publicly owned land. The Government were proposing to stop the land being publicly owned and to sell it off as part of privatisation. That has led to the delays, which have been described in *The Sunday Telegraph* as an "absolute shambles".

The Government's top priority was coal privatisation, rather than the needs of the coalfield communities. That has had the effect—as my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Mr. Cummings) pointed out—of deferring useful investment developments in coalfield areas. Companies that may have been thinking of investing have deferred that investment, because they thought that if they waited until an enterprise zone was established, they might be able to invest on better terms. That is another example of the way in which the Government's incompetence and slovenly approach is damaging the coalfield communities.

Another thing which must be borne in mind is that it is not just in terms of special provision that the coalfield areas are not getting the help that they deserve. They are being robbed on a day-to-day basis in terms of the grant which the Government pay out to every local authority in the country. The coalfield communities are not getting the grants that they deserve. Everybody accepts that if ex-coalfield areas are to survive and prosper, they need better standards of education and training. But in every single one of them, what is currently threatened is not an expansion or improvement in education and training but a cut because the Government are cutting the funding. That is being done for the benefit of Westminster.

The funding that Westminster city council receives per pupil to help pay for education in Westminster should be applied as generously in some of the coalfield areas. If that were so, Nottinghamshire would not be

contemplating having to reduce the number of teachers—it would be able to increase the number of teachers by 4,000. County Durham would be able to increase its number of teachers by 2,400, while the figure for Derbyshire would be 4,100. But that is not happening, because the rotten stinking Government are shifting the money into the pockets of their friends in Westminster and are taking it away from everyone else.

As I have explained time and again, all of this springs from the fact that the Government regard Westminster as the fourth most deprived place in Britain, although nobody in their right mind believes that. The House heard my hon. Friend the Member for Easington movingly describe the extent of deprivation in his constituency and in his district, which is the third poorest in Britain in terms of average income. On the index of deprivation that the Government have drawn up which states that Westminster is the fourth most deprived place, Easington is 338th. I do not know whether that is a tragedy or a farce, but it is certainly unfair, rotten and entirely typical of the Government.

After all of the pit closures, Newark and Sherwood—represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping)—is 156th on the index of deprivation. Barnsley is 319th, while Bolsover—represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)—is 331st. If Bolsover received the same help from the Government towards its council spending per head of population as Westminster, the council in Bolsover would not collect any council tax at all—it could pay out a rebate of £1,015 to every council tax payer. That shows the extent to which the Government are fiddling the grant system.

It is not just a question of the special help being insufficient, as the Government short-change the coalfield communities day in, day out. There are the problems of derelict land, and it has been pointed out that the takeover by English Partnerships may result in English Partnerships putting money only into the sites that it has taken over from British Coal.

In the Environment Act 1995, the Government emphasised the concept of the polluter pays, but we must make sure that that concept is not used to the disadvantage of people living in the coalfield communities. If English Partnerships or the Government said to a local council that they would not give the council derelict land grants until it received money from the polluters, that would cause a great deal of delay. It would not be the polluter who was paying, but the polluted. We have to make sure that measures which are basically steps forward are not used to damage coalfield communities.

The Government continue to encourage opencasting. One third of all the coal that is produced in the country is opencast. Opencasting is ugly, noisy, dirty and unhealthy and it deters other investment in coalfield areas. None of the Ministers present would want, I certainly would not want and I do not think that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would want an opencast mine in our area or at the end of our back garden, but the Government wish it on tens of thousands of people in the coalfield areas.

There is also the problem of mine water pollution, which my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood described earlier. In proceedings on both the Coal Industry Bill and the Environment Bill the Labour party made sensible proposals to ensure that the Coal Authority took full statutory responsibility for dealing with mine water pollution, which can be so damaging. It damages the environment and, like opencasting, it is a threat to councils which seek to encourage investment in their area.

All the dangers and problems that we have described are building up for the coalfield communities. Many of them are inherited from the days of absentee thieving coal owners. What we have now is an absentee Government who do not give a damn about the people who live in mining areas.

10.50 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): We have just listened to a traditional rant from the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) which showed an appalling lack of understanding—his traditional lack of understanding of standard spending assessments, education funding, the revised mineral planning guidance 3, the planning system and revenue support grant. The hon. Gentleman laughs, but if what he suggested were applied he would be laughing on the other side of his face for his constituency. However, we are not talking about Holborn.

The subject of today's debate is important and important issues have been raised. The hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) raised one aspect of the vista, although there is much more to it. I regret that I have only a few minutes and will be able to touch on only one or two of the positive things that are happening.

I was interested in some of the points made by the hon. Member for Easington (Mr. Cummings). I shall read them tomorrow, consider them and perhaps write to the hon. Gentleman. I know that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) always sees a light at the end of the tunnel and that it is an oncoming train every single time. I was interested to hear him load the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras with so many promises that he looked like the hunchback of Notre Dame sitting there nodding to them. Fortunately for the hon. Gentleman, he will never be in a position to implement or even answer for them. He will probably remain where he is, in opposition.

We need to emphasise some of the positive points. While I recognise that it has taken some considerable time, particularly with initiatives involving Europe, to put some of the positive ideas into action and make finance available, they are now under way. The coal industry is now privatised, with 29 former British Coal pits in the private sector—many more than were anticipated by the pessimists. They are successful. I am not picking on the hon. Member for Sherwood—every Back-Bench Member looks at his salary patch—but I am sure that it will hurt him to know that according to a newspaper report yesterday on what is received by the mining community, he would be financially better off working for the privatised mining industry than he is sitting on the green Benches at the back.

The success of privatisation is worth recognising, but time does not allow me to push and promote it. We need to look at the efforts that are being put in nationally by the Government. The Government recognise the needs and the deprivation of coalfield areas. Mention has been made of the £200 million package. It was put in place to help communities affected by job losses. It includes £75 million provided

[Sir Paul Beresford]

through training and enterprise councils and the Employment Service and £75 million for the three-year English Partnerships programme of factory and site provision. The programme cannot be implemented overnight, as even the hon. Member for Sherwood recognises. We have provided £30 million-worth of other measures and £20 million for various strategic projects.

Regardless of some of the points that have been made, the delay in setting up enterprise zones has been caused by difficulties with the European Community. Considerable efforts have been put into the matter and enterprise zones are now under way. New zones have got off to a good start. To give just one example, in east Durham, 250 jobs are already coming in this year.

Unemployment has fallen nationally by 730,000 since December 1992. It was down again last month. Let us take the east midlands, the hon. Member for Sherwood's area. He mentioned the Robin Hood line. The Government's contribution has increased, as he said, to £9.6 million to meet the cost increases and the cost of the new station at Kirkby in Ashfield. That is welcome and it needs to be pushed. Stages 1 and 2 of the line are now open and doing well. Stage 3 will be funded in 1997-98, subject to the Department of Transport criteria on value for money. The hon. Gentleman will recognise that that is the correct way to go forward.

The North Nottinghamshire training and enterprise council coal plan has brought in £14.8 million as part of the £75 million that went to TECs. Recent consultants' evaluation has shown that the North Nottinghamshire TEC coal plan has delivered several thousand jobs and training places and has reduced unemployment by between 3,600 and 4,500. The hon. Gentleman asked for an assessment. That is an assessment and it shows that regeneration is happening. NNTEC still has some £800,000 to spend during 1996 plus surplus funds generated by coal-related activities. Those funds will be used in future coal activity.

The coalfield areas fund has been mentioned. It will provide £163,000 of grant to two projects in the Newark and Sherwood district. One of them, the Gwendoline Grove training centre in New Clipstone in the constituency of the hon. Member for Sherwood, has produced nine business starts, 88 training places and 50 small businesses. With the growing economy, small businesses now have an opportunity to grow. That is positive.

A round 1 single regeneration budget grant of £1.5 million is under way in the Sherwood part of the Newark and Sherwood district. The total programme value is £8.6 million. It is set to create 1,690 jobs, 300 new businesses and 4,300 sq m of commercial floor space. That is all extremely positive. Jobs and chances for growth have been created, but the hon. Member for Sherwood did not mention that.

A round 2 SRB grant of £1.13 million has recently been announced to regenerate Newstead village. The total value of the programme is £3.3 million. It will result in 4,000 sq m of new business space, another 80 new jobs, 250 improved houses and so on. A total of six SRB programmes are already under way in the former east midlands coalfield area. That is £28.5 million of SRB grant, levering in £146 million of other public and private funding, thus amounting to a total regeneration package of almost £175 million. That was conveniently forgotten by the hon. Member for Sherwood.

The forecast output from those six SRB programmes is 19,000 jobs, 12,500 people trained, almost 28,000 sq m of business floor space and 500 hectares of land reclaimed. It is happening. Three further SRB programmes were approved in the east midlands under round 2, including one in Newstead village, again in the Sherwood constituency. That is £1.13 million of SRB, giving a total programme value of £3.3 million with leverage.

We created new assisted areas under regional selective assistance in 1993 in the wake of the mine closures. There have been 114 offers of grants since then and £12.6 million of RSA will bring about £130 million of investment and create or safeguard almost 5,000 jobs. The biggest RSA grant of £1.7 million went to Johnson Controls in Mansfield—an American company that has built a new factory and is already employing 450 people.

Unemployment in the area has dropped dramatically. It fell by 5,700 in 30 months—it will extrapolate like a logarithmic graph. I will write to Opposition Members to explain as they obviously do not understand what such a graph is.

I can touch on only a fraction of the various points—the importance of the coalfield areas, the industries there, the hope for the people, housing for the people, the housing investment programme and the housing action grants. Endless volumes of money are going into the areas, with new ideas, strategies and partnerships. There is new hope and there are new jobs and better education. To listen to the gloom and doom described by Opposition Members is to deride the considerable efforts that this nation is making for those communities.

Waste Disposal

11 am

Sir Roger Moate (Faversham): First, I must declare an interest as I am the parliamentary adviser to the British Paper and Board Industry Federation. Just in case I am accused of trespassing on the new rules about advocacy, however, I must make it absolutely clear that it is very much a constituency matter that has caused me to seek this debate on waste disposal and recycling or incineration and it is certainly a matter for the county of Kent.

I should like to take this opportunity to put on record the fact that the borough of Swale, which covers my constituency, can describe itself with some justification as being among the greenest in Britain in terms of recycling. The steel mill at Sheerness is among the most advanced in Europe and recycles 1 million tonnes of steel a year. The United Kingdom paper mills and St. Regis paper mills at Sittingbourne and Kemsley are at the forefront of European technology and also recycle about 1 million tonnes of paper each year.

More than most, the area understands the importance of securing more recycled materials in an environmentally acceptable way. We now face a proposal that is unacceptable environmentally. The draft Kent waste local plan proposes a waste-to-energy incinerator plant at Kemsley, near Sittingbourne, to deal with a large part of the county's municipal waste. It is to be one of four possible proposed sites to handle up to 1 million tonnes of waste each year, as we steadily and rightly move away from reliance on landfill. I suspect that that story is familiar in other parts of the country.

The Government recently published a White Paper, Command Paper 3040, "Making Waste Work", which is, as yet, undebated in the House. That is not a criticism, because it was published only in December. The way in which Government policy relates to proposals such as the one for Kemsley makes it right for the House to study that classic example and the consequences for local areas of Government policy—the way in which such policy translates down to local areas. This House is not a local planning inquiry and hon. Members would be impatient if one tried to treat it as such, but I hope that they will forgive me for dwelling briefly on the Kemsley location, for the reasons that I have just given. I must emphasise that any proposal for a large-scale municipal waste incinerator located at or near Kemsley, or at nearby Ridham, would be totally unacceptable on environmental grounds.

Swale borough council has made its total opposition clear in a cogent and powerful argument against the case. Local residents are united against it and landowners and industrial landowners are opposed, as am I. This is a matter for the Minister. The Government office for the south-east, GOSE, is also critical of the plan. Our area is part of the Thames gateway planning framework which, according to the GOSE document,

"seeks to bring forward a new environmental standard for the area in order to raise perceptions and encourage new sustainable development which contributes positively to the environment which has suffered in the past."

In that respect, GOSE calls the waste plan "disappointing".

I repeat that we are part of the Thames gateway planning framework. The work of introducing new environmental standards for the area has been helped in my locality by a remarkable committee called the Kemsley and district pollution liaison committee, which was formed five years ago. It comprises representatives of 2,000 local residents, the borough council, the National Rivers Authority, local industry and Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. It has met and has achieved a great deal in an area that has suffered from pollution and a perception of low environmental standards. The House will understand, therefore, why there is such opposition to the proposal. Apart from the host of other environmental objections, the fact is that the plant, like all large plants of the kind, could generate up to 400 vehicle movements per day.

On the opening day of the inquiry into the draft plan, the inspector asked the county council three crucial questions: why incineration, why four locations and why those four locations? I hope that I am not being unduly optimistic in perceiving from those questions that the inspector shrewdly and quickly realised the misconceptions on which the strategy was based. I hope that he will respond accordingly and will assist our county in a major rethink of policy. I also hope that he will take into account debates such as this, as well as the on-going debate that is taking place in the country. I hope that he, and we, will reject the almost blind acceptance that seems to be fashionable—the belief that incineration is, or should be, the principal means of disposing of mixed municipal waste as the principal alternative to landfill.

I shall give some of my evidence, and it is evident that such an assumption is wrong. Better recycling options are available. They are better, cheaper, tried and tested. If Kent and other counties become committed to the long-term contracts needed to support such large and costly incinerators, which have capital costs running into hundreds of millions of pounds, we could be making a strategic mistake that will have profound consequences for many years to come. They will include: first, an appalling waste of valuable, recyclable materials that should and could be recycled; secondly, the generation of large-scale lorry movements to support large, centralised plants; thirdly, excessively high gate fees per tonne of waste, which could consequently waste millions of pounds per annum throughout the country; and, fourthly, the continued fear of dioxin emissions. As for the latter, whether it is perceived or real, the fear will be there. All that is true for Kent and I think that it is also true for the rest of the country.

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): On the possible emissions, I am sure the hon. Gentleman will have been confronted with the argument that incineration is a safe form of disposal. How can people arrive at that conclusion when one considers that all the chemical compounds that are produced as a result of the incineration process have still not been identified? Without such information, how can people arrive at the conclusion that incineration is the best method of disposal? Perhaps you could elaborate and tell the House what responses you have had when you have asked such questions.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that he must address the Chair and that interventions should be short.

Sir Roger Moate: The hon. Gentleman has an important point about not merely what scientists say today but the continuing fear about what will be learnt. I shall

[Sir Roger Moate]

return to the subject of dioxin emissions, although that is not the key part of my remarks. We have received assurances, but the fears, the debate and the controversy will certainly continue.

I was about to say that we should not criticise waste disposal authorities for having moved rapidly to consider the incineration option on a large scale. That has, indeed, been the prevailing mood. As we move away from landfill as the answer to waste disposal, it is not surprising that such authorities have grasped that option, nor should they be criticised for doing so. We should now pause, however, and re-examine other technologies that are on offer. One wants to be balanced and sensible about the matter. We must have a balanced approach and different situations require different solutions.

I am sure that incineration and recycling technologies can and should work together, although different areas and industries will advance different arguments and favour different methods of handling waste. A debate such as this will inevitably involve generalisations about incineration versus recycling, but I see nothing wrong with examining the principles on which we are operating.

We are, I think, right to fear that the incinerator philosophy has gone too far, and to believe that it should be checked and that, at the very least, all incineration proposals should be tested rigorously against the available recycling options. Kent tells us:

"There is a growing national and international recognition that incineration with energy recovery is the only acceptable method currently available for disposing of household waste in the quantities required . . . Recycling is essential but for the foreseeable future is likely to be an adjunct to mass treatment like waste to energy rather than a substitute."

That reflects the statement on page 11 of the summary of the White Paper "Making Waste Work":

"there is substantial potential in England and Wales for the expansion of waste to energy power generation particularly in urban areas where it is the main alternative to disposal by landfill."

I emphasise that last point, because I do not agree: waste-to-energy generation should not be seen as the main alternative to landfill.

Even the 17th report by the Royal Commission on environmental pollution—which is widely cited as favouring incineration—says the opposite. Although it deals with incineration and shows how it could be made acceptable, its conclusion in chapter 10 states that energy recovery should be pursued only when waste cannot be recycled. In the so-called waste hierarchy—as perceived by both the European Community and this country—recycling ranks above energy recovery. We should remind ourselves of the existence of that hierarchy, and favour recycling whenever it is a practical option.

The speed of change seems to have caused people to overlook the new technologies that have become available. In trying to solve the problem of emissions, we have tended to ignore other developments in the world. I understand that many integrated recycling plants—mechanical plants that do not use incineration—are currently operating, some in this country. Such plants take a mixed waste stream—the contents of the familiar black sack or wheelie bin—and separate the waste mechanically. They process paper, card, metal, plastic, glass and kitchen and garden waste—charmingly described as "putrescables"—leaving 10 or 20 per cent. that can be used for compost or building blocks, or for landfill. A modest amount is always likely to be used for landfill, but the proportion is vastly different from what we are discussing today in regard to either incineration or recycling.

I understand that Berkshire is currently deciding on the use of just such a plant. The specification is impressive: the plant has a design capacity of 175,000 tonnes, and will recycle all the municipal waste that I have described, leaving a very small residue. The result will be splendid, if it can be achieved—and there is no reason to doubt that Berkshire takes practical considerations into account before signing such contracts.

What is remarkable about the plant is that it is such good value, as well as being environmentally better and more popular than the alternatives. The capital costs of such plants are much lower—which means that the gate costs will inevitably be lower. There need be no debate about toxic emissions, because no incineration is involved.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Rather than examining a plant that is still at the planning stage, the hon. Gentleman should visit West Yorkshire, and Leeds in particular. It is one of the leading-edge authorities, which has developed a first-class recycling technology. We need not discuss theories and plans; the hon. Gentleman should come to see what is already being done, and could be done even better if money were invested in recycling rather than the alternatives.

Sir Roger Moate: That bears out what I have said about the availability of alternative technology. It is puzzling that a number of authorities still seem to base their strategies on incineration. Although I shall resist the temptation to examine more waste disposal facilities, I agree that we should concentrate on what is happening in practice.

I was describing the cost advantages of recycling. I have found it difficult to obtain the precise figures during the short time in which I have studied the subject in the context of our county plan because, understandably, they are said to be commercially confidential; some local authorities, however, need to know the figures in order to make strategic decisions. There is a conflict between the need for commercial confidentiality and the need for transparency.

Mr. Llew Smith: I have had considerable experience of the problem of commercial confidentiality in attempting to obtain information from incineration companies, as have local authorities that would like to provide the information. Surely the answer to such difficulties is a freedom of information Act, which would enable the hon. Gentleman to obtain the type of information that can be obtained in the United States through pressing a button in the local library.

Sir Roger Moate: There will always be a need for commercial confidentiality, but once a local authority has entered into a contract the figures ought to be publicly available, because the charge payer is footing the bill.

I have heard that the gate fee for the Berkshire plant is about £20 a tonne. That is not much more than the landfill costs, including the new landfill tax. I am told that the gate fees for large incinerators can be as much as £30 or £40 a tonne, or even £50. I am also told that recycling

plants can be viable at about 50,000 tonnes per annum, with a gate fee of about £25 a tonne. Whatever figure we take, however, there appears to be a large differential in favour of recycling rather than waste-to-energy plants, which must be very large to be economically viable. A differential of perhaps £10 can mean charge payers in any one county or waste disposal area having to pay millions of pounds a year. That is serious money, so we must get it right and not make mistakes.

Small local plants—the 50,000 tonne variety that I have described—have many other advantages. For instance, they avoid one of the main environmental problems: the large-scale movement of heavy lorries that is involved in nearly all major operations. The smaller and more localised the plant, the fewer problems—which generate understandable opposition among local residents—will be caused. Given the Berkshire example, I do not see why Kent should not have a network of smaller recycling plants, involving no burning of waste, minimising lorry movements, maximising the recovery of raw materials and reducing landfill by 80 or 90 per cent.

The arguments might be very different if we were convinced that waste-for-energy plants could produce low-cost electricity on a large scale, at a competitive price and in worthwhile quantities, which would make them viable in the long term. I confess that I should be happy to receive much more information on whether we are producing low-cost electricity compared with other forms of energy generation, and whether we are producing it on a large enough scale. I suspect that we are producing extremely expensive electricity that is sustained by the high gate fees that local authorities must pay to send in their waste and by temporary financial support by levy associated with the non-fossil fuel obligation.

To replace all the recyclable materials that are destroyed by incineration requires five times as much energy as can be generated from their destruction, so it is hardly the right way to save energy. It takes much more energy to recreate paper, metals and other materials, which should be recycled. It would be helpful to know the figures and to have a range of statistics to allow local authorities and hon. Members to judge the financial advantages or long-term commitments of those options.

I have not dealt with dioxin emissions and do not intend to do so. I readily believe that scientific and technological controls can be imposed to eliminate most dioxins, but whether that cost can be met and permanently sustained I do not know. I also readily believe that the extremely stringent new emission controls will greatly reduce emissions. HMIP recently published a review on dioxin emissions, but I am not sure whether that is the end of the story. It would be helpful if my hon. Friend the Minister could say whether he expects further reassurances, reviews or statements from HMIP on that point, because those would influence decisions now being made on incinerator proposals.

Whatever reports are issued, people will continue to fear pollution, perhaps justifiably, with all the attendant controversy and local objections. Nothing will remove people's worry about the possibility that new pollutants will be put into the atmosphere. It would be much better to avoid the whole argument by seeking a better recycling option, with all the advantages that I set out earlier.

I make no apology for returning to where I began—Kemsley in my constituency. There are overwhelming arguments against the development there. Industry and the community, reinforced by Government officers in the south-east Thames gateway planning framework, have been striving successfully to raise environmental standards. The House will understand why any new developments that resurrect the spectre of unhealthy emissions will be particularly resented. I hope and believe that any such threat will soon be removed with regard to the Kemsley proposal and that our county, encouraged by the Government, will now pause and ensure that smaller-scale recycling plants, not large incineration plants, are at the heart of local plans for disposal of municipal waste.

11.23 am

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): I congratulate the hon. Member for Faversham (Sir R. Moate) on introducing this debate. It proves that the best way to proceed is to make a speech in the House on a matter that starts with a constituency interest, as that leads one to do a great deal of homework. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on grasping all the essential principles of the balance between waste recycling, incineration and burial. Those of us who have long been interested in this subject believe that a balance is important. We shall always bury and incinerate waste. Intelligent and highly sophisticated incineration that produces energy is much better than the incineration that we have seen over a long period in this country, which simply burns waste and produces toxic emissions.

Those of us who have passionately supported recycling for a long time want the Government to back it in terms of both tax policy and a direct lead from the Department of the Environment to make recycling both possible and probable. That needs firm Government action. Although I congratulate the Government on some aspects of their White Paper, I believe that they have dilly-dallied for too long compared with our European neighbours, who have followed best practice. We need to move fast not only to encourage recycling but to ensure that it is the first option to be considered.

I suggested tongue in cheek that the hon. Member for Faversham should come to see Leeds and West Yorkshire. If all local authorities in Britain were as good as the best, we would be a long way down the line. We must strike the right balance, and recycling must always be the first option. The hon. Gentleman was spot on when referring to energy costs. Once waste is transported long distances, all the benefits of energy conservation are wiped out. It is self-defeating to transport glass, aluminium or other materials for recycling over long distances.

I shall keep my intervention brief. The hon. Member for Faversham is welcome to join the parliamentary group for sustainable waste management to carry on this debate. It is about time that we had a serious debate of the White Paper in the House. As usual when the House debates an important subject that has such a great effect on the lives of our constituents, there is a deplorable lack of press interest. I hope that we shall have a continuing robust debate on this subject.

11.26 am

Dame Peggy Fenner (Medway): I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to a debate initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Sir R. Moate)

[Dame Peggy Fenner]

because we are subject to the same waste disposal plan. I agree with the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) that the best debates start with a vested interest in a matter concerning one's constituency. Within a few miles of each other in my constituency are two of the four incinerators, so it will not surprise hon. Members to know that my constituents are concerned. They have not gone in for spectacular lobbying but have set up an organisation in the village of Halling to think of alternatives. They did not simply say, "We do not want the incinerator in our back yard." They have called their organisation "Waste-Not-21—A waste disposal plan for the 21st century".

Although I rise to speak against incineration because we have insufficient assurances about it, I am well aware of the problems of waste disposal in a sophisticated packaging and waste producing country. The United Kingdom shares that problem with all its European colleagues and internationally with enormous countries that produce a great deal of waste, such as the United States.

My constituents all attended that conference on a Sunday afternoon, which is not a great afternoon for inviting people. However, they are working people and they were all available, as I was. My constituents had the benefit of the knowledge of Professor Paul Connett—a professor in chemistry from St. Lawrence university, New York—about the dangers of producing dioxin. He pointed out the dangers of an amount of dioxin the size of a pinhead. He was not trying to frighten my constituents to death, but chemists worry about the carcinogenic properties and genetic effects of dioxin. The people who are considering incinerators today will not be around to defend their actions if we discover problems in later years. Chemists also worry about the effects of dioxin on breathing. The action group wanted to bring the breath of life to Halling, not destroy it.

The meeting also had the benefit of hearing Professor John West, who is responsible for a company called Environmental Reclamation International. As my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham mentioned, that company is currently providing recycling facilities near Reading, in Berkshire. I was interested to hear from the hon. Member for Huddersfield that he has very good recycling facilities in his county. More information about recycling would be helpful to my constituents.

Professor West has instigated recycling approaches in Europe, and the hon. Member for Huddersfield referred to advances in Europe. However, not all the initiatives in Europe have been advances. I recall that Germany got into such a mess with waste disposal that it put an extra levy for waste disposal on every package and every bit of waste. It then paid money to export waste from Germany. That is not the right way to go—to export one's waste elsewhere.

My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham referred to the recycling initiative that Professor West initiated. When Professor West came to that Sunday afternoon meeting and spoke to my constituents about the recycling initiative, it sounded to me to be a very good alternative. It produced no toxic hazard, and the residue was only 10 per cent. Even with incineration, some residue is produced which has to go into landfill.

My constituents have, for some years, been well aware of the hazards of transporting substances from one area to another. My constituency has the most desirable mineral deposits in north Kent and consequently, for years, we have had lorries carting valuable chalk for cement over our roads, mainly over the infamous A228. The waste for the proposed incinerators would also have to travel over that road. My constituents are worried about shifting the waste by road to the two incinerators. Ironically, it would not even be their waste. The process is centralised, and waste would come from other constituencies and other district council areas.

Kent county council held a public inquiry last autumn. Mr. Hargraves, on behalf of the Halling action group, went to give evidence. Professor Connett also flew in from New York to give evidence on behalf of my constituents about the chemical hazards of incineration. We are awaiting the inspector's report, and my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham asked the Minister to let him know about other reviews with evidence about incineration. I understand that the chief medical officer is carrying out an investigation into the dangers of dioxin. My constituents are awaiting the result of that investigation because it must affect the public inquiry held by Kent into incineration.

We are committed to considering all methods of dealing with waste, and as the 21st century approaches we shall have more and more waste. However, we must be sure that the policy we choose is not one that we shall regret or change our mind about in a few years. We have the time now to study the options before we embark upon a course of action. I have carefully considered the quite tough targets for reduction in the production of waste set by the Department of the Environment. As the chairman of the all-party group on the retail industry, I also know that that industry has quite a burden to reduce waste considerably. That is the first thing we have to do.

I expect that housewives—and there are not many of us in the Chamber—will be buying their washing powder and liquid in biodegradable refills, so that there are not so many plastic bottles to get rid of. When plastic is burnt in incinerators, it becomes lethal. If plastic is not burnt and instead is dealt with in other ways, it does not produce such disastrous pollution.

My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham referred to how much energy could be produced by incinerators. That is a powerful argument. If one could get rid of waste by recycling it into energy, that would be good, provided that the chemical reactions were acceptable. The figure quoted was 18 MW of electricity. However, we have not been told how much energy would be used to produce that 18 MW. Surely we need to know that, if the arguments about the possibilities of creating energy are to be believed.

Even if we can find a safe way in which to incinerate which produces enough energy to make it worth while and valuable, it still produces exceedingly toxic ash, which has to go into landfill. The United States has reduced the landfill requirement by 50 per cent. by recycling alone. The proposed incinerators would reduce the landfill requirement by 60 per cent., but by what we regard as a rather doubtful method.

I wrote to Kent county council because I was extremely worried about the proposals for two incinerators in close proximity along the river at Halling and at Kingsnorth.

The council assured me that no planning application would be considered until the inspector had made his report after the inquiry, at which time the issue of whether there should be any incinerators would be decided. The report on the safety of incineration was not yet available so I was quite reassured that no action would be taken until it was available, and the chief medical officer had reported on the dangers of dioxin.

I was concerned to learn this week from the Kent director of transportation and highways that he has advised his staff that they should start to prepare contracts. It seems that the director is accepting the principle of the incinerators before the matter has been decided and before the valuable reports are in the hands of my constituents. When they have received the reports, they will know that, if incineration is the option decided on, every effort has been made to ensure the safety of the system.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will tell me that there will be no decisions about contracts or even any move towards contracts until the two reports are in place and we know for sure what is happening. I also hope that my hon. Friend will ask his Department to look at Professor West's interesting initiatives on recycling.

We have had much waste disposal in north Kent over many years. As soon as mineral holes have been dug, they have been filled with waste, with the consequence of heavy traffic for my constituency. My constituents are incensed. They are prepared to make arrangements for their own waste, but they do not see why north Kent should be the repository for waste from around the county. Not least among their arguments is that to cart waste from other areas into the Medway towns adds to the cost of waste disposal. It also places a heavy burden on an already over-burdened transport system.

11.40 am

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): This debate is an extension of our debates on the Environment Act 1995. As a result of those debates being guillotined, we were denied the opportunity to discuss many issues that we would have liked to discuss. This debate on waste and recycling is significant and it is a matter in which I have a great deal of interest. In West Yorkshire, we have the largest landfill and reclamation site in the area, following the quarrying and mining there. West Yorkshire generates substantial waste because of the industrial opportunities there and domestic waste is generated as well. This debate is, therefore, important.

To say that we must do something about reducing the amount of waste in landfill is an understatement. We must do everything that we can to reduce the amount of waste that is being deposited in landfill sites. Valuable materials can be recycled and more emphasis should be placed on recycling waste.

Recently, there have been traumatic discussions about the packaging industry and about how the levy that is being set by the Government should be imposed. Sadly, we could not find a suitable system for imposing the levy. I understand that a compromise has now been reached with the V-WRAG people as the result of a division within the group. The decision is not unanimous, but the compromise is being accepted and we hope that it will work. It has to be reviewed in two years' time. That is the kind of debate that we should be pursuing. I hope that the Minister will refer to the V-WRAG proposals on packaging waste and I hope that he will tell us how he considers the new compromise will help to reduce the amount of packaging and to encourage the recycling of packaging waste.

The landfill tax is designed to reduce the amount of waste that is deposited in landfill sites. Some aspects give rise to concern. It seems that the landfill tax, which is due to be implemented in October, will be applied across the board without further consideration of the consequences for areas where waste is generated beyond the control of man. I refer to our waterways.

The Aire and Calder navigation, which is still in use, flows through Normanton. It has to be dredged to ensure that boats can travel along it. We are advised that the waste from the dredging, which will be deposited on the land, will be subject to tax. We have a ridiculous situation. Beyond the control of anyone in the Chamber or anyone in the Government, waste will be generated and it cannot be recycled. Some of it will be valuable as cover at the landfill sites and for base material. However, paying £7 or £7-plus for each tonne of waste generated by dredging our waterways will be a tremendous burden on the inland waterways business.

I therefore make the point strongly to the Minister that some consideration must be given to that anomaly. In his Budget statement, the Chancellor of the Exchequer said that the levy would apply to all waste. I make the plea this morning that consideration should be given to waste generated by our waterways in the form of dredged material. I hope that the Minister will be sympathetic on this point because the tax will have a tremendous impact on our waterways.

The Institute of Wastes Management is working hard with Members of Parliament, the Government and local government to improve communication with the public about waste management. In an October 1995 publication entitled "Communicating with the Public", the institute says:

> "There is a genuine need for the Waste Management Industry to change its attitude towards communicating with the public."

The institute admits that it has not communicated properly with the public on the control of waste, the deposit of waste and the collection of waste. It now wants to correct that. It continues:

> "The collection of our commercial and domestic waste is generally regarded positively, as a public service. There is still, however, a need to keep people informed of such things as changes in the service or proposals for recycling."

All those involved in waste depositing and recycling are now making a specific effort to work with the House, the Government and local government to ensure that people are made aware of the advantages that can develop from recycling waste. Many members of local authorities are as keen on recycling waste as we are in the House and many people work voluntarily to help recycle waste. As has been pointed out by other hon. Members, people in local government have a substantial interest in recycling waste. Parliament should give all possible support to those in local government who are interested in the matter and who are determined to ensure that waste is both recyclable and recycled. We should give all possible support to the packaging industry because it works hard to reduce the amount of waste to landfill.

In the House, two all-party groups are considering that problem. My hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) referred to the sustainable waste

[Mr. William O'Brien]

management group. We also have the waste glass recycling group, which meets frequently to discuss ways to improve the recycling of waste materials.

Incineration was mentioned earlier, but certain products of waste will have to be recycled. I refer in the main to waste tyres. We have tried to use tyres for building walls and making barriers, but there are so many of them that disposing of tyres is a problem.

In Yorkshire, Sheffield city council has introduced a scheme for disposing of waste tyres, and I consider that the experience that Sheffield has in generating heat from waste will benefit the communities of Yorkshire and Humberside especially, and those in a wider area, in disposing of waste tyres.

We have a wide area to cover. The problem is not confined to plastic bottles and paper packaging. We, as Members of the House, should analyse a host of other materials. The Government should support at all levels the efforts of people who are bringing pressure to bear to reduce the amount of waste to landfill. Recycling brings benefits.

I hope that, following the debate, the Minister will respond to some of the anxieties expressed by hon. Members. I hope that the Government will adopt a positive approach by sustaining the argument in all sectors that waste and recycling issues matter as much to the Government as to people in local government and in the industry.

I am pleased to take part in the debate. I hope that we may have further debates on that subject, because of its importance.

11.51 am

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Sir R. Moate) on initiating the debate. It happened that we both sought permission to initiate Adjournment debates on the same subject, and I am pleased to join him in today's debate and release my Adjournment debate for tomorrow night to another colleague.

It is important to balance recycling, incineration and landfill. Instead of considering specific elements in isolation, we must consider as a whole all those different ways of tackling the escalating volume of waste.

The debate gives me an opportunity to welcome the Government's recently published White Paper, "Making Waste Work", which will stand for many years as a guide to best practice in the waste management industry. I warmly congratulate my hon. Friends in the Department of the Environment on the work that went into the preparation of that report.

I shall concentrate on the contribution to effective, integrated waste management of energy from waste plants. By "energy from waste", I mean the process whereby household waste is burnt in modern plants to create energy and reduce the volume of waste going to final disposal, which was spoken about earlier so eloquently.

The White Paper rightly recognises the role of energy from waste and its increasing importance in the United Kingdom. It says:

"using waste of one type or another to supply useful energy is a well established method of obtaining added value before final disposal and will increasingly represent the best practicable environmental option for many wastes".

At the moment, as hon. Members know, landfill remains the dominant route for disposal in the UK, and accounts for about 85 per cent. of the 35 million tonnes of municipal solid waste. However, in many parts of the country, such as London and the south-east, the status quo is an option that is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain, owing to the scarcity of landfill spaces.

Several years ago, the village of Rufforth in my constituency was chosen for a new landfill site by North Yorkshire county council. When the site was identified, there was a great deal of opposition from local people, as might be imagined. The plan involved creating a hole in the ground and using the soil from the hole to cover the waste as it gradually filled up. It has a 13-year life. That emphasises the shortage of landfill sites that confronts local authorities. We must ensure that other options, including waste to heat and recycling, are considered thoroughly.

The White Paper sets important new targets, which will aid the transition to more beneficial uses for unavoidable waste. When considering the role of energy from waste plants, I emphasise that I do not mean old-style waste incineration. Such plants, largely designed and built in the 1960s, are being rebuilt or phased out and replaced by modern energy from waste power stations, which have greatly enhanced environmental performance to set alongside their energy recovery capabilities. However, as the White Paper says:

"the incinerators and their gas cleaning plants will operate to substantially higher technical and environmental standards".

My hon. Friend the Member for Medway (Dame P. Fenner) mentioned dioxins; I shall discuss them shortly.

Energy from waste plant capacity in the UK should now enjoy a time of expansion. It is thoroughly sensible to use waste to create energy, and especially to provide electricity and heat to people who live near such plants. The overwhelming environmental advantages of treating municipal solid waste in modern energy from waste plants instead of landfilling raw waste are become more widely accepted, although there is a great deal of ignorance on the subject.

Mr. David Evennett (Erith and Crayford): I am very interested by what my hon. Friend says. Does he agree that we should therefore hold a full debate on the White Paper as soon as possible, so that all of the issues may be discussed in a longer debate?

Mr. Banks: I would strongly welcome a full debate, because many more hon. Members than will be able to speak today will want to take part in it. There is scope for a wide-ranging debate on this subject.

We can draw on evidence from the Royal Commission on environmental pollution—the organisation that proved that using energy from waste plants is the best practicable environmental option. Developments in Government policy are starting to create a more level playing field, so that environmental considerations, not only those of cost, influence local authorities and other people charged with finding waste management and disposal solutions.

There was huge local opposition to the proposal for a landfill site at Rufforth, which led ultimately to the local authority managing the site extremely well. People no longer complain—the site is well screened by trees.

A modern energy from waste plant operates at South East London Combined Heat and Power—SELCHP—which is a power station in south-east London that I visited recently. It is in the constituency of the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock), whom I am delighted to see on the Front Bench today. I apologise to her for not extending to her the courtesy of knowing that I was going to visit that power station before doing so.

Major redevelopments are in hand in Coventry, Edmonton, Nottingham and Sheffield. An energy from waste power station is nearing completion at Tyseley in Birmingham and another is under construction at Cleveland.

Older-style incinerators are being substantially upgraded to meet new environmental standards set by the European Union and Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. SELCHP is an especially good example. It is an excellent building. I commend the architects on using their design skills to create an attractive building. People who live close by no longer complain, because they were consulted at all stages of that development and it provides them with heat and power. I pay tribute to the developers of that plant, who discussed the design and practicalities of that plant exhaustively with all the people who live in the vicinity.

Ms Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I must place on record, because my constituents would expect it, that many of the people who have newly purchased homes in the district did not know of the presence of that facility when they undertook to make their purchases and are very unhappy about what they regard as a facility that affects the market value of their property. There are other people who, as the hon. Gentleman rightly says, were properly consulted and are happy with it.

Mr. Banks: I am interested to hear that observation. I shall deal later with the point about the construction of buildings. If the building did not have a chimney, I dare say people would not be so worried. If they knew the facts about the cleanliness of the atmosphere in their area, and the remarkable steps that are taken to clean the flue, they would perhaps come round to a different view.

Energy from waste has important environmental advantages. It reduces the volume of waste, avoids the environmental impact of gas and contaminated liquid seeping from raw municipal solid waste in landfill sites and conserves fossil fuels. It displaces pollution that would result from alternative generation and reduces significantly greenhouse gas emissions, which are with increasing confidence thought to be a cause of global warming—a point that we need to discuss in a wider debate. I hope that such a debate will be held.

Energy recovery from waste in high-technology plants is recognised world wide as safe, efficient and environmentally beneficial as part of an integrated strategy for sustainable waste management. There still remains, however, a considerable challenge for the private sector, in partnership with local authorities, to introduce schemes that surmount the contractual, planning and public attitude hurdles new plants may face.

My hon. Friends the Members for Faversham and for Medway referred to the difficulties with local opinion when such proposals are made. NIMBYism is, unfortunately, a strong deterrent in the UK, notwithstanding the significant success of SELCHP. I would advise my hon. Friends' constituents who are concerned to visit SELCHP and see for themselves what the plant looks like. They could also be briefed on what it is doing.

A subsidiary of Powergen is seeking approval to build a Thameside energy from waste power station in the borough of Bexley to produce 130 MW of electricity and consume 1.2 million tonnes of waste. It is faced with the same problem of winning over local opinion to approving the project.

In addition to the waste strategy White Paper, the non-fossil fuel obligation and landfill tax are the chief economic instruments that are helping to ensure that the cost of waste disposal via energy from waste plants is comparable with that of landfill. That is a sensible Government policy to have instigated.

The energy from waste industry, through the Energy from Waste Association—the industry body that promotes best practice and consults the Government and local authorities on all issues relating to energy from waste—has strongly argued that combustion residues should be landfill-taxed at the lower rate: £2 as opposed to £7 a tonne. It is important that the benefit of the tax in closing the gap between the cost of landfill disposal and energy from waste is not destroyed by the cost of disposal of the ash residues that result from the combustion of waste as a renewable fuel.

Ultimately, energy from waste can succeed only where it can demonstrate greater environmental benefits than other available waste management options. This key point, obvious enough to waste management professionals, is often missed by the industry's opponents. It simply will not do to criticise energy from waste against some imagined absolute standard of desirability.

It is important to look at energy from waste in the context of other forms of waste management and recycling. In considering the waste hierarchy, the term given to grading waste management options in terms of their environmental benefit, energy from waste, materials recycling and composting should be placed on the same level after reduction and re-use. To place, as some do, recycling on a higher level than energy recovery wrongly suggests that recycling—this is where I depart from my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham—is invariably of greater merit than energy recovery, and should be pursued to the exclusion of an integrated strategy including energy from waste.

The Conservative party is a broad church, and I think it good that we can debate these matters and disagree with each other about them.

It should be remembered that even the hierarchy has its limitations. Re-use may not have a lower environmental impact than, say, recovery. A holistic approach surely offers the best prospect of achieving sustainable waste management solutions at affordable cost. The White Paper takes that line.

Indeed, some experts are beginning to take the argument even further. In a recent paper, Dr. Lyndhurst Collins of Edinburgh university argued that recycling paper, specifically, could lead to an increase in the level of carbon dioxide. He says that new assessments show that incineration of waste paper to generate energy is a viable and more beneficial option for the environment than recycling.

[Mr. Banks]

My point is that energy recovery and recycling ought to be seen not as two mutually exclusive options but as parts of an integrated waste management programme. In the UK, we achieve low levels of both—7 per cent. and 3 per cent. respectively—yet other countries are demonstrating how it is possible to have far higher levels both of recycling and of energy recovery. For example, Germany recycles 18 per cent. of its waste, with 36 per cent. energy recovery; Switzerland recycles 29 per cent., with 59 per cent. energy recovery; and Denmark recycles 23 per cent., with 48 per cent. energy recovery.

I believe that we need to motor fast with the policies of recycling and energy from waste. Currently, the UK's performance in terms of recovery could and should be improved, and that would have a beneficial effect on rates of recycling.

The Government are examining other ways to give improved guidance to local authorities, as part of a plan to achieve higher recovery rates. In addition, given the shortage of suitable sites for energy from waste plants, the Government should strengthen regional co-operation and co-ordination so that the provision of new facilities is not left to the vagaries of the local planning system. The White Paper should give an important boost to the development of regional solutions.

I am conscious of the fact that time is evaporating and that the Front-Bench spokesmen are anxious to speak, so I shall turn finally to the subject of dioxins—an important element in the equation. New concerns about dioxin emissions from energy from waste plants were raised last year by the United States Environmental Protection Agency. There has been disagreement about the integrity of the science basis of the EPA draft, both in the United States and in Europe, and the feeling persists that it was unjustifiably alarmist. The eminent toxicologist, Professor Bridges, of Surrey university, told a Manchester conference recently that the dioxin issue was largely political.

The royal commission has not changed its view on energy from waste, and the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food has not altered the tolerable daily intake for dioxins, which is the amount the committee considers people can be exposed to every day with no adverse health effects. There nevertheless remains a concerned and rational international consensus on the need to reduce environmental dioxin.

Since 1993, incinerators have been tightly regulated—more than many other processes. All plants must meet the new standards, including a very low dioxin limit, required by HMIP; they will have to close if they do not. Some incinerators have been significant sources of dioxins, but the industry has put its house in order and, by next year, will account for an insignificant proportion of the overall dioxin burden, even if there is a large increase in the waste processed.

To give some idea of the scale, a modern energy from waste plant emits a tiny fraction of 1 gramme toxic equivalent a year, against, for instance, measurements of 40 grammes from sintering—carried out in steel making—and an estimated 1 to 2 kg arising from a single accidental plastics fire, to say nothing of the emissions willingly caused by the public on Guy Fawkes night.

I warmly welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate, and I hope that a better understanding of the importance of energy from waste will be heard.

12.7 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Faversham (Sir R. Moate) for raising this subject. It is not particularly romantic, as we know, but it is crucial. The debate also gives me an opportunity for a five-minute rant on a subject I feel strongly about—the fact that our country, and especially my borough of Newham, is litter strewn.

Litter is a big problem in Newham. I seem to represent some of the dirtiest constituents in the country. [*Laughter.*] What is more, I say so regularly in the local newspapers. That was the gist of my new year greetings to the good folk of Newham—that they were a pretty filthy bunch who should clean up their act.

People in my area, Forest Gate, ask me what the council is doing about the mess. I have to keep pointing out that the council officers do not creep around at midnight dumping litter on the streets. It is the people who live in the area who are responsible for the mess. The council has done its best by putting as many bins as possible around the area. Miraculously, the bins seem to move up and down the street, always managing to avoid the places where the litter is dropped.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms); when he was leader of the council, he was keen to introduce the extra bins. His predecessor, Ron Leighton, used to go out with teams of people picking up litter, trying to set an example to the people in the area.

I do not know why people are so filthy—it is difficult to understand. Perhaps they lack a sense of community. Perhaps their homes are as filthy as the streets. I do not know—I suspect that they probably are not—but a feeling exists that, somehow, public property is second class and unimportant and one can litter the streets because it is not important and someone else will clear up the mess. It is an irresponsible attitude but, in many ways, it is based on the Government's philosophy that private property is sacrosanct and must always be highly regarded, protected and enhanced; public property is second hand and second rate and people do not have to have the same regard for it. That philosophy spreads its way through society. That is my theory, for what it is worth.

Many hon. Members have said that recycling is the key. Of course recycling will play an important role in waste disposal, but it is difficult to recycle if people simply dump their litter in the streets. I have a number of straightforward, on the street proposals. First, we need far more education in schools about litter and waste. In many cases, kids are responsible.

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): Although I do not wish to comment on whether the hon. Gentleman's constituents are dirty, I agree with the point that he has just made. Does he agree that educating people about waste minimisation and the advantages of home composting, which could deal with one third of all household waste, is an excellent way of moving forward but has not been mentioned so far?

Mr. Banks: I agree. Education is the key. Many of my constituents might be dirty in that they drop litter, but they are also politically astute. I must say that in case it is thought that I am being unusually critical of my constituents.

All confectionery and fast-food shops, and those that sell wrapped items, should be required to have litter bins outside their premises. Shopkeepers should be required to clear the immediate vicinity of their premises. Many good shopkeepers do precisely that.

We have heard a lot about the peace dividend, which we welcome, in Northern Ireland. I should like to have a peace dividend in terms of the return of litter bins in London Underground stations and in mainline terminuses in London, which would be helpful as well.

We should require manufacturers of all products that eventually become waste, including motor vehicles and tyres, which have been mentioned, to take them back for recycling. That is done in Germany and a number of other countries. The Government should seriously consider that.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has just come back from Singapore. No doubt he saw that the streets were very clean. Singapore has a good way of dealing with the problem. I think that people's hands are chopped off or people are birched if they drop litter in the streets. I am not so extreme, but we should be far stricter with people who litter our streets.

One of the good things that Singapore has done is ban chewing gum. I am a great chewer of chewing gum, but I do not spit it on to the streets or on to underground train seats, which many people seem to do. A large number of poor old pigeons can be seen limping around because their claws have got caught up in a ball of stinking chewing gum. Perhaps we should make Wrigleys responsible for cleaning the streets and underground train seats.

I had so many more good ideas to put to the House but, unfortunately, time has run out and I must resume my seat so that Front-Bench Members can speak.

12.12 pm

Ms Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) not only for ending his speech there but for cheering us all up for this debate's final round. I congratulate the hon. Member for Faversham (Sir R. Moate) on securing the debate, and I especially pay tribute to my hon. Friends because they have given the House the benefit of examples of good practice by Labour authorities in this sector.

I have a special interest in waste disposal because, as a newly elected Member of Parliament, illegal fly tipping was the first community problem that was brought to me. The residential community had been terrorised by criminals who, over a period of years, dumped thousands of tonnes of rubble in their midst. Two years later, my private Member's legislation was placed on the statute book, creating a registration scheme for waste carriers and heavy penalties for tippers.

People who live near the generation or disposal of waste have long known its environmental costs, but until recently, the public at large appeared oblivious to the enormous cost, in terms of pollution, raw materials depletion and human illhealth, of our consumerist, throwaway society.

For 10 years, the Government observed the problem of massive growth in waste of all sorts: inadequate landfills, illegal dumping, cowboy operators, poor monitoring and the development of dangerous incinerators, and that was just on land. The scope of today's debate is necessarily limited, but we should remember the massive dumping of radioactive waste, munitions and sewage sludge in our coastal waters and the wider seas, and the continuing pollution of our rivers from current industrial sources and abandoned mines.

In essence, the subject of today's debate is the Government's waste strategy, published as a White Paper just one month ago. It is long overdue. No Government can be pledged to a strategy of sustainable development, as this one say they are, and not produce a national waste strategy, yet on waste, as on so many other crucial topics, the Government have struggled to reconcile the need to regulate and to enforce with the dogma of deregulation and privatisation.

Even now, 15 years on, we have only a White Paper. Laudable though its proposals are, they apply only to England and Wales and no statutory force is promised for the strategy before 1997 "at the earliest". I can therefore say with some confidence that the responsibility for implementing a national waste strategy for the United Kingdom will fall to a Labour Government.

Labour has long accepted that the creation of a national sustainable strategy for waste is an integral part of an overall strategy for sustainable development. The Government seem to accept that in their White Paper, yet they have no energy policy and no strategy for sustainable transport. I have no doubt that, if, as is deemed will happen, the Environment Agency is given the resources and, more important, the political space in which to propose a national waste strategy to Government, it will create a sea change in waste management.

Labour has long accepted the notion of the waste hierarchy and was among the people criticising earlier Government proposals that failed to put waste reduction at the top of that hierarchy. Even now, its inclusion, which we welcome, is inadequately dealt with in the White Paper. Ministers claim lack of accurate data, yet only one year ago they proposed stabilising household waste generation at 1995 levels, with progressive reductions as soon as possible. Why has that proposal been abandoned?

There cannot be any individual household, business or institution in the land that could not reduce its waste production with a little thought and effort. The Government's promise to introduce a strategy by the end of 1998 is frankly pathetic. Although that may be a realistic target for the collection of national data, much more positive action on reduction should be sought in the meantime.

Controversy also surrounds other parts of the hierarchy. Re-use follows reduction, with which we wholeheartedly agree, but again the Government say little. Industry, however, can offer some good examples and other nations have done much to use market mechanisms such as deposit refund schemes to encourage re-use.

In our view, and that of most environmentalists, the next stage in the hierarchy should be recycling and composting. The Government have chosen, however, to include both under the heading "recovery" and to give energy from waste equal status to them. That brings me to the heart of today's debate.

[Ms Joan Ruddock]

Is there any potential conflict between recycling and incineration? I think that we would all agree that the hon. Member for Faversham argued a persuasive case in favour of recycling. Nationally, because recycling, composting and incineration account for such a small percentage of actual waste treatment, the scope to develop all three is vast, but at local level, conflicts can occur.

The South East London Combined Heat and Power plant in my constituency, which has been mentioned and which, I hasten to add, is a state-of-the-art incinerator that is carefully and properly monitored, faces such a potential conflict. Its financial viability obviously depends on securing waste contracts of sufficient magnitude to run the plant efficiently. If its existing local authority contractors were to seek dramatically to increase the percentage of waste they recycled, which the Government propose they should do, clearly, they might want to plan for smaller future contracts with the incinerator company. I raise this only by way of illustration because I am aware of the need properly to evaluate recycling processes which themselves consume energy and can have environmental consequences and because I am also aware of the value of energy recovery through the burning of waste. It is our belief that environmental considerations should be paramount in the decision-making process.

It is clear that, to reduce pollution and transport costs, much recycling and recovery need to occur close to the point of waste generation. That means close co-operation between business, industry and local authorities. As the Government appear to have accepted that, will the Minister tell us what will be the regional basis for decision making of that kind?

Let me return to the waste hierarchy. After reduction, re-use, recycling and recovery comes disposal. As we have heard in the debate, that is a point of great controversy. There is not just the issue of incinerators; no one wants to live next to a landfill. I remind the hon. Member for Medway (Dame P. Fenner) of the factory farm site at Borstal, an appalling landfill which has caused great distress to her constituents.

Because hundreds of millions of tonnes of controlled waste are generated per annum, we know that there will be a need for incineration and landfill to continue in the short and medium term. Our guiding principle should be to minimise the dangers to the environment and to health from such facilities. That means proceeding apace with the closure of all incinerators that do not meet the highest modern standards, ensuring public access to data for all waste disposal facilities and minimising the need for new facilities by a comprehensive strategy with targets for the entire waste hierarchy. That is where the Government signally fail. Setting and achieving targets on the top two rungs of the hierarchy is essential to making progress in ultimate disposal. Instead, the Government simply appear to be relying on one blunt market mechanism—the landfill tax. Shifting a proportion of disposal from landfill to incineration may be desirable, but only if overall waste is reduced.

The Government's targets are modest in the extreme—a mere 10 per cent. in the proportion of controlled waste going to landfill over a 10-year period. Even the mechanisms are not clear. Local authorities are expected to play a significant role, not least because 90 per cent. of household waste goes to landfill. The White Paper proposes a target of 40 per cent. recovery of value from municipal waste over the next 10 years and a target of 25 per cent. recycling of household waste within five years.

Will the Minister tell us how the landfill tax will impact on local authorities and will he give a clear indication of the financial implications for local authorities of the White Paper targets? Can he explain the reference to supplementary credit approvals in the context of waste collection that is subject to recovery rather than disposal? That is in the White Paper, but my reading of the recent public expenditure settlement is that such supplementary approvals to encourage recycling projects will be cut by two thirds within two years. Will the Minister confirm that? If that is so, can he explain how the Government intend the proposals to work or is that perhaps the secret of their strategy—a laudable White Paper, a load of good intentions but no political will to implement them?

12.23 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison): I welcome the opportunity to respond to the debate. I join other hon. Members in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Sir R. Moate) on securing it. It has been a good, constructive and well-informed debate and, perhaps inevitably, much of the focus has been on recycling. That was certainly the case in the contributions from my hon. Friend the Member for Medway (Dame P. Fenner) and the hon. Members for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), who spoke briefly and to the point, for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) and for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). I was not sure whether the hon. Member for Newham, North-West was recycling some of his jokes or disposing of them. I was interested in his method of greeting his constituents in Newham. He made some interesting points.

The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock) could have been a little more forthcoming in welcoming the Government's targets and accepting that they are ambitious targets. She will know of our target to reduce the amount of household waste going to landfill and to bring about a 25 per cent. target for recycling and composting of household waste. She knows of our targets for landfill and for municipal waste. The hon. Lady will see that our strategy is wide ranging and comprehensive and is backed by initiatives and ambitious targets.

I was interested in the hon. Lady's comments about energy recovery from incineration. She seemed to criticise that at the beginning of her comments, but there was a lack of detail about the basic point of where energy recovery from incineration would fit into her hierarchy—whether it would be alongside recycling, composting or somewhere else. She fell silent on that issue.

My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham was concerned about a number of detailed points in his locality. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Medway, he spoke forcefully about local issues and local views, which are always important and need to be taken into account. My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham will understand that I cannot go into detail about the Government's view because there are obvious reasons why I cannot comment on matters that are still within the province of inquiries. However, it will be open to inspectors at inquiries to take into account the general

approach set out for recycling in our strategy document entitled "Making Waste Work", which was issued just before Christmas.

My hon. Friend referred to what he saw as the blind acceptance of incineration as a principal alternative. I can reassure him that that is not the way in which incineration fits into the strategy overall. I invite him to see the strategy as a method that seeks to bring about the best practicable environmental option in any given case. The hon. Member for Huddersfield and my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) referred to a balanced approach. The Government's approach in the strategy document is balanced and can bring about the best practicable environmental option in each case.

I invite my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham to see incineration, alongside recycling in its place in the hierarchy, as something that must be analysed in each case. We must consider the environmental advantages and disadvantages, some of which were dealt with by my hon. Friend.

My hon. Friend was also concerned about dioxins. He looked for assurances from me about the Government's approach to that and about future statements from HMIP. In September last year, HMIP published a report entitled "A review of dioxin emissions in the United Kingdom". It examined known and possible sources of dioxins in the United Kingdom and updated the estimates which my Department published in January 1995 as part of its response to the United States Environmental Protection Agency's draft assessment, about which we heard earlier. The HMIP report predicts that full implementation of integrated pollution control by HMIP and other control measures by local authorities will reduce the figures for dioxin emissions appreciably.

My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham talked about the relative cost of recycling and incineration. It is difficult to compare like with like in this situation as there are no typical examples. Fees will vary according to size, location, type of waste, outstanding capital finance liabilities and other factors. My hon. Friend may find it helpful to know that generally energy from waste costs between £10 and £30 per tonne more than landfill. Recycling costs vary widely, depending on the factors that I have identified.

My hon. Friend also made some important references to the general benefits of recycling and those matters will be taken into account. However, he will not be surprised to hear that I cannot agree with him that it is always a simple case of either/or—both recycling and incineration with energy recovery may have a part to play. The two are not necessarily exclusive. It may be that, in any particular case, both can combine to bring about a solution.

On that note, I want to emphasise that the Government have an appropriate and comprehensive strategy which sets ambitious targets. Hon. Members are concerned whether individual cases will fit into that strategy. I promise that I will give hon. Members a detailed reply by letter.

BSE and CJD

12.30 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise, albeit briefly, the issue of bovine spongiform encephalopathy and concerns about the possible connections with Creuzfeldt-Jakob disease. My particular interest in the issue arose out of representations I received in 1991 from the family of a constituent who had been diagnosed as suffering from CJD. Since that time, I have asked a significant number of questions in Parliament, of both the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of Health, the answers to which have, on some occasions, left me in some doubt about how seriously the Government are treating public concern about BSE and the possible connections with CJD.

My serious concern is how much the extent of BSE infection and its implications have been underestimated by the Government. The Minister will recall that by 1989 BSE had been studied for some three years. In that year, the report of the Southwood working party on BSE predicted that the total number of cases would be between 17,000 and 20,000—on the assumption that vertical or horizontal transmission did not occur.

According to a parliamentary answer on 31 October 1995, by 26 October the number of confirmed BSE cases in the United Kingdom was 154,150. I understand that the figure is now about 157,000. In view of the length of time that it takes for an animal to show signs of the disease, it is reasonable to assume that many more affected cattle must have been slaughtered before symptoms were recognised. To put it mildly, there is a significant discrepancy between the Southwood predictions and the latest figures. It is important to consider the possible reasons for that.

When the Southwood working party was announced on 21 April 1988, the Government said that they would legislate to ban the feeding of rations that contained protein derived from ruminants. That decision arose from studies completed a year earlier, which concluded that the only viable hypothesis for the cause of BSE was meat and bone meal from ruminants. By the time the Southwood committee reported, it was assumed that the ban—introduced on 18 July 1988—had been implemented effectively. The subsequent ban on specified bovine offals was, according to the Government, a precautionary measure introduced alongside assurances that any health risk to humans from beef consumption was remote.

We all recall a former Minister publicly forcing burgers down his daughter. The tone of such highly placed reassurances, geared to a concerned public, clearly also left farmers, abattoir workers, renderers and compounders believing that affected cattle showing signs of the disease would hold no risk to humans. Now, the Government are implying in parliamentary answers and statements that a key factor in explaining the huge difference between Southwood's maximum of 20,000 and the reality of more than 157,000 is widespread breaches of regulations.

The Times on 20 November 1995 quoted Government statements to the effect that the state veterinary service made unannounced visits to 193 abattoirs last September and found failings in the handling of offal in 92 of them. The service visited 153 in October and found failings

[Mr. David Hinchliffe]

in 52. Although the Government's statements were qualified to assure the public that such failings were mostly not of a serious nature, the implications are clear—that such problems offer some explanation of the extraordinary discrepancy in the figures for infected animals.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hinchliffe: I am afraid that time is limited. I had hoped for a longer debate. I do not intend to give way, but I mean no disrespect to the hon. Gentleman.

Unfortunately, the limited number of prosecutions for such breaches—for example, only two in 1991 and 1993—undermines the Government's professed concern about the alleged law-breaking. The figures for confirmed cases clearly raise a serious question about whether previous assumptions about vertical or horizontal transmission are correct. The Minister will know that between September 1988 and April 1989, new-born calves were removed from more than 600 dams in a Ministry experiment and were reared on fresh grass, with the aim of quantifying the extent, if any, of vertical transfer. According to a parliamentary answer on 31 January 1995, by that time more than 30 of those animals had developed BSE. Will the Minister confirm my information that by last month the figure had risen to 42?

I also note from a letter from the Minister on 20 November that since the feed ban was imposed in 1988, more than 22,000 calves with BSE have been born, one as recently as June 1993. The range of ages of those born since the ban is virtually the same as those born before it. In a series of replies, the Minister has claimed that all 22,000 were exposed to remnants of contaminated feed. However, that does not explain the results of the experiment, which seem to show the occurrence of vertical as well as horizontal transfer.

On 23 October 1995, the BSE advisory committee—the SEAC—announced that it had reviewed the reported case of CJD in a farmer who had a case of BSE in his beef suckler herd. It noted that three previous CJD cases had been confirmed in dairy farmers whose herds also had BSE. It concluded that it was difficult to explain that as a chance phenomenon given the statistical excess of cases on cattle farms compared with the general population.

The SEAC's statement noted examples of CJD in other European countries with few or no cases of BSE. I know that the Government have also drawn such comparisons on a number of occasions. However, it has been put to me that those comparisons are flawed unless the number of BSE and CJD cases are expressed as a fraction of the at-risk cattle and the human population. Assuming an annual incidence of CJD of one case per million of population per year and 20,000 farmers at risk, I understand that it would be expected that one farmer at risk would succumb only every 50 years—not four in the past three years.

Serious questions must also be asked about assumptions about BSE-free herds, in relation to both the domestic and the export meat trade. The *Craven Herald and Pioneer* newspaper, in its edition on Friday 8 December 1995, reported the conviction of two farmers—Stephen and John Thompson, a father and son, of Old Hall farm, Gargrave, Yorkshire—for trades description offences. They included falsely declaring the age of a calf and not declaring that the animal had been born to a BSE-infected cow. The report quoted John Thompson as saying to Skipton magistrates:

"We have had around 1,200 BSE cases on our farm and have kept these out of the food chain."

In the following week's edition of that newspaper, on 15 December, a letter was published from R. W. Payne, of Marton close, Gargrave, pointing out an apparent error in the previous week's report of the court case. The letter said:

"It surely cannot be that they have had 1,200 cases when the whole of North Yorkshire had had 7,000 total over the last 10 years. At a time of BSE worries, I think that the correct figure should be found and printed this week."

The letter was accompanied by an editor's note stating that both figures were correct.

I am reliably informed that the herd in question contains around 100 milkers and that the worst possible scenario would be an average of 2 per cent. BSE cases a year, giving a total so far of, say, 20. A number of cases totalling 1,200 is regarded as being completely impossible, and it has been put to me that the only way in which so many BSE cases could be collected is by the farm representing a massive offloading station for other farmers who can continue to claim that their herds are BSE-free.

I am unclear about the legal position on transferring animals in such a way. It is just one illustration of the way in which figures on the incidence and location of BSE-infected animals are open to serious question. It is also evidence of the financial pressures of centralising on one herd. I will be interested to hear the Minister's thoughts on the implications of that practice.

I will also be interested to hear the Minister's thoughts on the policing of the order made in 1991 under the Animal Health Act 1981, banning the use of protein material derived from specified offal as fertiliser. I shall refer to another cause for concern in Yorkshire. I understand that for several years Keighley abattoir has put unusable and unsaleable blood and guts into tankers, the contents of which have been sprayed on fields owned—I am told—by Mr. Harvey Smith, which are in close proximity to the local Graincliffe reservoir. It is apparently a common sight to see gulls foraging on the freshly sprayed fields before settling on the nearby reservoir.

If what the tankers spray is not specified bovine offal, I would stress that that practice, as I understand it, is perfectly legal. I wonder, however, how it is possible in a slaughterhouse to ensure that such specified offals are totally separated, especially when cattle comprise the greatest volume of carcases. I would welcome the Minister's thoughts on that.

Apart from my serious doubts about the assumptions that the Government are making in relation to the transfer of BSE, I am greatly concerned about the effectiveness of the measures being taken to keep infectivity out of the human food chain. Although it is possible to exclude bovine tissue from symptomatic cattle entering the food chain, how can the Government guarantee that no infectivity from infected but non-symptomatic cattle from purportedly BSE-free herds will enter the food chain? The Minister will of course recall that the "World in Action"

programme screened before Christmas showed that symptomatic and pre-symptomatic cattle with BSE were being eaten in the United Kingdom.

Sir Bernard Tomlinson, the neuropathologist who has advised the Government on health issues, was reported in *The Times* on 14 November 1995 as saying that he was no longer eating products likely to contain beef offal. His decision was based on the rise in cases of CJD, the disproportionate number of farmers contracting it and the recent deaths of two teenagers from the disease. He stated that the Government are taking an unjustifiable risk in allowing brain and other offal from calves under the age of six months into the food chain. His views and the views of a number of other eminent scientists raising similar doubts about the Government's handling of the matter must be treated seriously.

The Government say—and I would accept it—that there is no evidence that BSE can be passed to humans. The other side of the coin, which I think the Minister will accept, is that there is no evidence that it cannot be passed to humans. If the Government cannot give a 100 per cent. assurance that there is no transmissibility to humans or that infected tissue from non-symptomatic cattle cannot enter the human food chain, there is clearly a serious possible risk to human health which must not be ignored.

I urge the Government to take a number of immediate steps in view of the present circumstances. First, they should take action to stop completely the movement of animals from infected herds and practices such as those in Yorkshire that I have described. In "Farming Today" on Radio 4 this morning I heard allegations being made about a similar practice in the Republic of Ireland. Will the Minister consider them? They clearly tie in closely with the concerns that I am expressing about Yorkshire.

In addition, the Government should prevent breeding in such herds and evaluate very carefully the advice of those who have urged a planned and sensible slaughter prior to the replacement of those animals from BSE-free herds on new territory. I stress that I have farmers in my constituency—with boundary commission changes I have an increasing number of them—and I do not in any way underestimate the cost implications of such a policy. We have to balance those costs against the future health of the nation.

The Government must markedly increase research into trying to find the agent responsible for CJD, the extent of infected produce that humans need to consume before they are at risk and treatments for the disease. It is quite incredible that, given public concern over the issue, research evaluation is being reduced by the Government.

The Minister for Food (Mrs. Angela Browning) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Hinchliffe: The Minister shakes her head. I shall be interested to hear her comments.

As a parent of two school-age children, I also urge the Government to take urgent and significant steps to reduce the risk to children, especially pre-school children.

I recognise that the Minister does not have a specific health brief, but will she, with her colleagues in the Department of Health, listen to the concerns of the CJD support network, an organisation set up last year by families who have cared for relatives with CJD with the backing of the Alzheimer's Disease Society? Specifically, I understand that the support network is pressing for CJD to be made a notifiable disease, for the establishment of an independent inquiry into the causes of it and for a much greater consideration of the practical help and support needed by those caring for sufferers. I endorse in full its concerns.

I am conscious of the need to give the Minister time to reply in some detail, but in the context of the question mark over BSE, may I press the Minister to recognise the serious lack of public confidence stemming directly from the Government's failure to separate ministerial responsibility for the production of food from the responsibility for consumer interest? I hope that she will understand that, regardless of one's views on BSE, there is a clear public perception that her Government are always rather more concerned with protecting the business interests of food producers than with the health of food consumers.

12.47 pm

The Minister for Food (Mrs. Angela Browning): Although I very much welcome the opportunity taken by the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) to bring this very important subject to the Floor of the House, I somewhat regret the tone in which he has presented his case. First, there has been no reduction in research into BSE. In fact, as a result of the Budget, an extra £1 million will be going into research into BSE. Of course the Government rely on the spongiform encephalopathy advisory committee to advise us on areas in which it feels additional research would be beneficial—whether it concerns BSE or CJD. We obviously listen very carefully to its advice.

The hon. Member for Wakefield raised particularly cases in Yorkshire and cited specific companies involved in the purchase of animals which he says act as a collecting point for BSE cattle. A total of 915 BSE-positive cattle have been reported by Messrs Thompson since 1988, of which 76 per cent. have been traced to the original owners. We take very seriously the question whether people—perhaps—on occasions try to circumvent the system in order to keep the BSE-free status on their holding through the offloading of animals as the hon. Gentleman described. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that, if he has further examples and writes to me, I shall ensure that officials do those tracings. If problems are found, obviously we will encourage trading standards officers to take out prosecutions. Prosecutions have been brought in cases in which we have found such circumventions.

The Government's position on BSE and CJD is based on listening to the experts and following the advice of the independent advisory committees, which are made up of leading experts. The opinion of the overwhelming majority of those experts working on BSE and CJD, not only in the United Kingdom but in the European Union and elsewhere, is that the Government's actions are not only prudent but sufficient to protect the safety of people who eat beef and bovine products. I must say that we have always taken the advice of the SEAC and put it into the public domain as quickly as possible.

The Government have a responsibility to protect the health of the individual by removing products that could present a risk from the food chain. But we also have a responsibility to take a balanced view and to avoid responding to unfounded fears by banning material that is perfectly safe.

[Mrs. Angela Browning]

It is wrong to suggest that the Government have been in any way reckless in relation to BSE and CJD. We have taken expert advice and worked on the precautionary principle that BSE theoretically could be a risk to humans. We have based our controls on that hypothesis even though there is no evidence that BSE can be transmitted to humans and despite good evidence gained from several centuries of experience that the similar disease of scrapie in sheep is not linked to CJD in humans. We have assumed that BSE could, in theory, be a risk. We have therefore taken proportionate action to ensure that the risk is removed should there ever be evidence that that scientific link is made.

On that basis, suspect cattle are destroyed—whether on the farm, in the market, at a dealer's premises or at the slaughterhouse—and their owners are compensated. It was also on that basis that the specified bovine offal ban was introduced. Again on the recommendation of the SEAC, we have tightened up the administration of the SBO ban in cases in which the order was not being complied with in accordance with the committee's advice. We have recently, for example, taken action to ensure that specified bovine offal is properly stained, separated and disposed of quite separately from materials which might enter either the human food chain or animal feed. Those important measures are designed to protect human health and have ensured that the only tissues in which BSE infectivity has ever been detected, either experimentally or in clinical cases, have been completely removed from both the human and the animal food chains.

The SBO ban applies to all cattle, other than calves under the age of six months, which are slaughtered for human consumption. As a result of experimental findings in 1994, the ban was extended to cover the intestine and the thymus of calves, which is a precaution because infectivity has not been detected in the thymus.

The Government's policy is a cautious, belt and braces approach. The "belt" is taking all cattle which show symptoms of the clinical disease out of the system and destroying them and the "braces" are removing the SBOs from all healthy cattle at slaughter. That ensures that they do not enter either the human or the animal food chains. The "braces" are required because we recognise that the "belt" cannot detect animals which are incubating the disease before the clinical signs develop.

The hon. Member for Wakefield raised the issue of animals going to market and then being sold on. He might be interested to know that animals often show no clinical signs of the disease on the farm, but that the clinical symptoms are accentuated because of the stress placed on the animal by the transit and the offloading at market. Animals are sometimes picked up at market which have been incubating BSE, but it is the transit which has exacerbated the clinical symptoms.

Much has been made in the media recently about the fact that we cannot identify infected cattle which show no signs of the disease. Some mischievous journalists have presented this as a new finding. The press notice issued in June 1989, however, when the SBO ban was proposed, made it clear that the ban was being introduced precisely because we recognised the fact that pre-clinical cases could enter the food chain. The ban was designed, and all the subsequent scientific evidence has shown that it was correctly designed, to remove all the tissues that could harbour the agent. The Government do not argue that BSE in cattle could not be a risk to human health if no preventive measures were taken.

The Government have taken an ultra-precautionary line, and the overwhelming view of international experts is that we have acted correctly. Unfortunately, that does not make a good story in the press, which has tried to whip the issue up into a frenzy of public alarm when there is simply no cause.

I must tell the hon. Gentleman that it is most regrettable that the media choose to interview scientists and people who are eminent in their own specialty, particularly of medicine, but who have not been involved in the day-to-day research and information collected on the subject. They have been paraded as advisers to the Government, but the media have then not agreed to interview the very people who advise the Government. That poses the question whether the media, lacking other news stories, particularly in the pre-Christmas period, were rather unprincipled in the way in which they went about reporting the subject.

Many eminent scientists, including the chairman of the SEAC, and the chief medical officer advise the Government. The chief medical officer, not the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, is responsible for human health. The hon. Gentleman spoke about the separation of responsibilities. Obviously MAFF Ministers must answer questions about the animal food chain and how it interfaces with the human food chain, but the chief medical officer has responsibility for human health. He has made it clear that if he felt there was a need to warn the public of a threat to human health it would be his duty to do so regardless of what was said by other Ministries and other people. I am quite sure that he would carry out that duty and obligation to the country.

Mr. Gill: The debate is about serious matters and I think that the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) was in danger of confusing the animal health issue with the human health issue. As he knows, there is no direct proof of any connection between the two. He was able to make such a speech because no scientist worth his salt—I am sure that the Minister would agree that this is the problem from her point of view—will stand up in public or publish his findings stating categorically that there can be no link between BSE and CJD or between any other animal disease and any other human disease. That is the problem. The fact that scientists cannot give that categorical assurance does not license the hon. Member or the press to continue to make allegations without any basis of truth or science behind them.

Mrs. Browning: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Although we have had some encouraging interim reports, the nature of the research into BSE and CJD means that it will take a long time to conclude and to come up with the definitive answer that I am sure that my hon. Friend and I would like. It is not a matter of saying that the Government could find some extra money to carry out a six-month experiment and we would then have the answer. That is not the nature of the type of research conducted. I hope that the hon. Member for Wakefield will accept that, because I am sure he will appreciate that if we could have come up with an earlier answer than that given so far, we would certainly have made sure that that was possible. Where possible, we encourage research that

is done in the private sector as well and put it in the public domain. Where possible, we also publish interim results and, although they are not definitive, they help to identify a trend and the thrust of research. That is helpful to us all.

I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House do not consider the subject a matter for party political debate. It is a grave matter, which the Government take seriously. We have at all times relied on independent scientific advice and have made it public. In particular, I hope the House will be interested to know that the most recent progress report on research was put in the public domain just before Christmas. I would like to tell the House that the chairman and deputy chairman of the independent SEAC committee have recently written to my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. The letter says:

"If there was any risk to human health from BSE, and there may be none, then we have no doubt that that risk is very much less in December 1995 than it has ever been."

I am disappointed that that clear statement of confidence has not been taken up by the media as vociferously as that which they said before, when they were trying to put the other side of the argument. I have arranged for a copy of the letter to be lodged in the Library today, and I hope that hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Wakefield, will avail themselves of the opportunity to read it and that it will reassure them.

Council of Europe (Russian Accession)

1 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): I am grateful for this opportunity to discuss Russia's application to join the European democratic community that is the Council of Europe. As the House may know, I am one of the three rapporteurs whose responsibility it is to recommend an opinion for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to offer to our Committee of Ministers, which will be debated at our next session in Strasbourg in two weeks' time.

It must be clear that, whatever our recommendation, it will have far-reaching consequences for both Russia and Europe. Should we decide to invite Russia to join, for which it has been pressing since 1992, we know that that will be a political judgment, made in the clear realisation that Russia has not yet reached our standards of membership, but that it is more likely to achieve those standards as a full member than if we were to keep it out in the cold.

Should we decide that we cannot compromise our standards to such an extent in the case of the largest country in Europe, we risk unknown consequences for Russia, Europe and the rest of the world. That dilemma was discussed in a debate on the same subject in another place just over a year ago by my noble Friend Lord Finsberg, in his capacity as leader of the British delegation to the Council of Europe—and I use this opportunity to record what an excellent leader he is.

At the risk of boring the House, before enlarging on my case for Russian accession now, I shall place on the record my personal experience, which has led me to the debate today. As a hitch-hiking student in the 1960s, I visited Leningrad and saw at first hand how Russian people were treated under the Soviet system, and how their human rights and fundamental freedoms were denied.

I was especially appalled by the way in which Christians and Jews were treated, and I was determined to do something about it—although, when I was a student, there were few opportunities for that, except by sharing my experiences with any audience that would listen.

Shortly after my election to the House in 1977, two things happened. First, I became involved in a human rights organisation called Christian Solidarity International, which campaigns on behalf of those who are persecuted for being Christian. It had recently been established in Switzerland to support the dissident Russian baptist pastor Georgei Vins. CSI sent me on several missions behind the iron curtain to meet brave campaigners for human rights, such as Father Gleb Yakunin and others in the Moscow Committee for the Defence of Believers Rights, many of whom were subsequently sent to the gulag.

Those visits, on which I can now look back with some satisfaction, were pretty hairy at the time—perhaps it is just as well that it was only recently that I learned that my KGB file described me as working at various times for MI5, the CIA and Mossad.

The second occurrence was that Baroness Thatcher appointed me to the British delegation to the Council of Europe, which provided me with an appropriate platform, in addition to the House, from which to publicise the

[Mr. David Atkinson]

human rights situation that I had seen at first hand in the Soviet Union and its European allies. I did so, in five reports over 10 years, with recommendations for member states to pursue in the Helsinki process, now the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

I was especially delighted that the Vienna concluding document of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe—as it then was—dated 19 January 1989, which only Ceausescu's Romania refused to sign, defined freedom of religion according to the CSI definition that I had recommended.

It was on the strength of those reports that I was appointed the rapporteur on Russia, following its application for membership. Russia had inherited the special guest status granted to the Soviet Union in response to President Gorbachev's commitment to reform, and that allowed a Russian parliamentary delegation to come to Strasbourg.

A year ago, it became clear that Russia under President Yeltsin had made considerable progress towards our standards of democracy and human rights. There is freedom of religion, of expression, of assembly and of association, and freedom for the media. Russia is also developing a multi-party system. We had found its first elections to the new bicameral Parliament that replaced the Congress of People's Deputies to be free and fair, but with certain shortcomings that we expected to be improved in the elections that were due last month. Indeed they were, as I saw for myself.

Russia's new constitution, clearly endorsed by referendum, established a presidential and parliamentary system similar to those of France and of the United States—although it soon became clear that the essential checks and balances between the presidency and Parliament would take time and experience to evolve.

Russia was also fast establishing a free market economy—too fast, perhaps one can say with hindsight, without adequate safety nets for the most vulnerable, and without an effective rule of law in place to deal with organised crime and with the former party bosses who knew how to milk and launder the proceeds of privatisation. The reform parties certainly paid a heavy price for that at the elections last month.

Russia still had a long way to go to improve its rule of law and its legal order, its criminal and civil codes, and especially the conditions in its prisons and detention centres, as the independent "Eminent Lawyers"—members of the European Commission of Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights—found in their damning report of October 1994. Nevertheless, there were grounds for anticipating that Russia might qualify for accession last year—perhaps, as some suggested, to coincide with the 50th anniversary of victory in Europe.

However, those expectations were dashed by Russia's conduct in Chechnya a year ago. The excessive brutality used, and the denial of basic human rights so effectively exposed by Sergey Kovalev, the former dissident and President Yeltsin's human rights commissioner, were in our view no hallmarks of a country preparing to join the Council of Europe. Consequently, we suspended dealing with Russia's application, while continuing to advise and assist in the search for an acceptable alternative political and peaceful solution to the problem in Chechnya.

After many meetings with the Russians, as well as with Dudayev's representatives in Grozny, the three rapporteurs felt able to recommend that we resume dealing with the Russian application, and the Assembly endorsed that recommendation last September. Following last month's elections to the state Duma, the Political Affairs Committee of the Council of Europe accepted the unanimous opinion of the rapporteurs that the Assembly should now recommend Russian accession.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): May I draw my hon. Friend's attention to a recent press report, written by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson), on his recent experiences in Chechnya? As I read that report, far from being an endorsement of Russia's candidature for the Council of Europe, it constitutes a jolly good reason why we should now reconsider that application very seriously.

Mr. Atkinson: Yes, I am aware of the report by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson), which appeared in The *Independent*. I read it last night, and I shall respond to it later.

I supported that final draft opinion of the Political Affairs Committee, because it now provides for eight of the 10 outstanding conditions that I regarded as essential, a copy of which I sent to the Minister's colleague, the hon. Member for Boothferry (Mr. Davis), in November. The first of those is to ratify the convention for the prevention of inhumane and degrading treatment of prisoners, which would end the unacceptable conditions in Russia's prisons. Others are: to effectively exercise those rights enshrined in the constitution relating to freedom of movement and choice of place of residence, which would end Russia's unacceptable permit system; to pursue legal reforms in line with European standards, which would—among many other things—bring to an end the unacceptable 30-day detention without charge and the unacceptable brutality and violations of the basic human rights of young conscripts and recruits in the Russian armed forces; to adopt a law for alternative military service, as foreseen in the constitution; to relax restrictions on international travel of the remaining so-called "refuseniks" who are aware of state secrets; to negotiate with the Churches the return of property stolen since the 1917 revolution; and to withdraw the 14th Russian army from Moldova within three years of the agreement of 21 October 1994.

Of course, I still want to see legislation to provide for the private ownership of agricultural land, which would do so much to realise Russia's food potential, but that remains a matter for its Government and Parliament.

I shall be proposing that the Assembly establish a special committee to monitor the situation in Chechnya and to come forward with proposals based on our own Council of Europe's expertise on the protection of minority rights, including our new framework convention, which both sides can accept. That committee will certainly monitor reports such as that given by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North, following his recent visit to Chechnya. He saw at first hand brutality not just by Dudayev's forces but by Russian forces, and he accurately reported upon that.

The House must be concerned about what is happening in the Chechen region at present. The holding of innocent patients as hostages by forces associated with Dudayev is

wholly unacceptable. We regard Chechnya as part of the Russian Federation. As we know, the so-called "Tatarstan solution"—providing for maximum autonomy short of outright independence—is negotiable. That is a clear message that I hope will emerge from the forthcoming debate on the Russian accession.

I appreciate that there will be those pessimists who will regard an imminent Russian accession as premature, a compromise too far, and dangerous for the Council of Europe. There is no doubt that Russian membership will represent the greatest challenge to the Council of Europe since we introduced special guest status for those countries emerging from communist control.

But we should be positive. Full membership will encourage the forces of democracy and reform in Russia, both in Parliament and in government. In the light of last month's elections, those forces need every assistance and co-operation, which the Council of Europe programmes—along with those of the European Union and our own excellent know-how fund—are providing.

Ratification of our numerous conventions—an essential condition of membership—will further encourage Russia's progress towards our European standards. Most crucially, of course, the ratification of the convention on human rights will provide for the right of an individual to petition the European Court, which—as we know only too well from our own experience—has a jurisdiction higher than any national court or Government.

No doubt it will be said that the ordinary Russian in the street will never get to hear of this unique protection of his rights, let alone about the legal processes which are there to realise it. My experience of Russian human rights organisations suggests a different conclusion. Born during the Soviet era, there are probably more human rights non-governmental organisations in Russia than in any other country, and those organisations are well aware of their rights in the constitution and in law. They will, I suspect, be seeking to put to an early test any violations, and with the utmost publicity.

I learned last night that the BBC's excellent Marshall plan of the mind trust—which provides information and advice to Russia on the consequences of reform—will include in its next phase the rule of law, human rights and the right of individual petition under the convention should Russia join the Council of Europe. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will ensure that that is properly financed through the know-how fund.

Should a reactionary, fascist or ultra-nationalist candidate be elected as Russia's next President in June, it will not be so easy for Russia to withdraw from the clear international legal commitments of full membership, amid all the publicity that such an unprecedented move would encourage. I would expect such a withdrawal to end Russia's association agreement with the EU and its partnership agreement with NATO, as well as to create problems for itself within the OSCE.

Let us not forget that the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Committee of Ministers have now in place improved machinery for the implementation of commitments entered into by all new member states. My task as rapporteur does not end with accession, but is to monitor, advice, assist, encourage and regularly report to the Assembly with as much publicity as possible. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister can confirm that it is open to the Committee of Ministers to suspend a member state which is seriously in breach of its obligations.

Alternatively, should the pessimists win and we decide to tell Russia that it must wait—probably for several years—for full membership, I have no doubt that President Yeltsin will feel obliged, as well as being overwhelmingly pressed, to withdraw the application. It would be a slap in the face for him, and for Prime Minister Chernomyrdin and the two Speakers of the Parliament who jointly signed an historic document in January 1995 which committed Russia to satisfy our conditions.

Such a decision would undermine the position of the reformers and democrats, who would be ridiculed by those who have always warned that Europe does not want Russia. It would encourage the forces of ultra-nationalism, racism, anti-semitism, xenophobia and intolerance—all things that the Council of Europe's summit of 1993 pledged to eliminate in Europe—in the run-up to the crucial presidential elections in June.

Should a candidate such as Zhirinovsky—who does not want Russia to join the Council of Europe, but is pledged to establish a Russian-dominated council of eastern Europe—be elected, we would be plunged back into the division, tension, threat and hostility of a cold war, which can lead only to rearmament. It would demonstrate that we have not learnt the lesson of Hitler, who was no part of an institutionalised Europe.

That is a risk we must not take. The next six months will be a decisive period in Russian history. Russian membership of the Council of Europe now can contribute to keeping Russia on track towards meeting our western democratic values, from which we, Europe and the world have so much to gain. I hope and expect the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to share my judgment in two weeks' time.

1.17 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Sir Nicholas Bonsor): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) for raising this important issue. The relationship of the west with Russia is one of the most critical subjects on which we must make decisions. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving us an opportunity to discuss the matter, with particular reference to Russia's accession to the Council of Europe.

My hon. Friend has personally played a most active part in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, both as rapporteur on Russia and as chairman of the committee on relations with European non-member states, in helping to bring Russia to the threshold of membership of this democratic family of 38 member states. My hon. Friend also has a deep experience of Russia and its culture, and his interest goes back to his student days.

It is remarkable to note how the family of the Council of Europe has grown since 1989. The fall of the Berlin wall showed that the former countries of the Soviet bloc were not just willing but able swiftly to embrace the democratic values and obligations to protect human rights enshrined and upheld by the Council of Europe—values almost taken for granted by the established democracies of western Europe. One by one, these countries have sought

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admittance to this unique club. Some have found it harder than others to meet the high standards required of members, which are based on the rule of law, parliamentary democracy and the safeguarding of human rights.

Russia has not found the journey to membership an easy one. It has had to negotiate a difficult road since it applied in 1992, and it has had to answer searching questions, particularly about the rule of law. It cannot have been easy for Russians, steeped in the secrecy of the Soviet and Tsarist traditions, to allow Council of Europe parliamentarians to inspect and check the nooks and crannies of the Russian establishment. For a country so soon out of the stultifying grip of 70 years of Soviet rule, that must have been a bitter pill to swallow, but swallow it did.

As a frequent visitor to Russia, my hon. Friend well knows the inner tensions that needed to be overcome in order to provide the assurances that political, legal and economic reforms in Russia continue to be sustained.

As my hon. Friend has said, the Political Affairs Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly is recommending in its opinion to the Assembly in Strasbourg later this month that the Russian Federation should be invited to become a member of the Council of Europe. The Assembly will debate and vote on this opinion, and, if it is approved, will recommend to Governments of the member states that Russia should become the 39th member state in February.

Some argue that it is wrong to allow Russia's admission before it has fully met the entry requirements. There is concern that it will lose the incentive to fulfil its obligations once it has acceded to the organisation, or that Governments will lose the will to monitor compliance with them.

Mr. Harold Elletson (Blackpool, North): Will the House get an opportunity to discuss the Assembly's decision, if it decides to admit Russia? Many of us here feel that it would be the wrong decision in the current circumstances. Many people throughout eastern Europe—Poles, Hungarians and Czechs—feel that it will be seen as a stamp of approval for Russia's brutal campaign in Chechnya, and another sign that the west is ignoring that campaign. They feel that it would be a dangerous move, which we would come to regret in the long term.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I shall come to Chechnya in a moment. It is not within my power to decide whether the House has a debate on the issue. My hon. Friend will have to take that up with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and the business managers.

Whether Russia should be admitted into the Council of Europe is, of course, a political judgment. On balance, the Government think that the arguments for Russian membership next month outweigh the disadvantages, and we welcome the prospect of early membership for Russia. Given the necessary political will, Russia seems more likely to try harder to meet the Council of Europe's standards if it is a member of the organisation than if it is kept outside. Membership would help to underpin Russia's commitment to political reform and democratic principles, and to the observance and protection of human rights.

In dealing with the preparations for Russian accession to the Council of Europe, we are facing a difficult task. The very size of Russia and its needs will make new and varied demands of the organisation as well as of the Russian Government. In this, Russia should be able to count on the firm support of its fellow members of the Council of Europe for encouragement, as well as advice and practical assistance.

For its part, the United Kingdom offers all three types of help. We sought to encourage Moscow most recently by supporting the EU statement of 2 October which welcomed the resumption of the procedure for Russian accession. We have offered advice to the Russians at both ministerial and official level to co-operate fully with the Council of Europe rapporteurs who are preparing the opinion on Russia's accession. We also offer practical assistance in the areas relevant to that application. In the last financial year we put almost £2 million of the know-how fund's resources to good use by funding projects ranging from reform of the criminal justice system to providing training courses for journalists.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East asked about the next phase of the BBC's Marshall plan of the mind. We received last month the BBC's £5 million proposal for phase III, which includes programmes on the rule of law and the individual's right of petition. We have already funded phases I and II of the Marshall plan of the mind, to the tune of approximately £4 million, and we are currently considering the latest proposal. I am afraid that I cannot at this stage give my hon. Friend the assurance he sought, but I promise him that we will consider the proposal carefully.

Within Russia itself, there are those who are unlikely to allow the Government to forget their commitment to improving the human rights of its citizens. My hon. Friend has drawn the attention of the House to the numerous and articulate non-governmental organisations in Russia. Nor should we overlook the power of a free media to open up to public scrutiny the actions of Government.

To be made to wait uncertainly on the sidelines would not strengthen Russia's interest in the Council of Europe, or help the democratic process. It is worth noting that a number of countries, already members of the Council of Europe, similarly use their membership to reinforce their commitment to democratic principles and human rights. Constructive dialogue from within the organisation can provide a way forward for each of these countries. Russia should not be an exception to this approach.

In this respect, however, the Government are opposed to the suggestion contained in the political committee's opinion that some form of special control body be set up to monitor Russia's performance with its obligations. Monitoring will be important, but it is just as important to treat all member states equally. We hope that this can be achieved through the existing Strasbourg monitoring mechanisms. Dialogue and co-operation, not accusations and confrontation, should be our watchwords.

My hon. Friend asked about the power of the Committee of Ministers over members which fail to honour their commitments. I can confirm that, if any member state seriously violates article 3 of the statute of the Council of Europe, it is within the powers invested in the Committee of Ministers to request that member to withdraw from membership under article 7.

If the member fails to comply with this request, the Committee of Ministers may decide that it has ceased to be a member, under article 8 of the statute. That is the ultimate sanction available to Government, and one which

we would not lightly contemplate. We expect and hope that the existing monitoring mechanisms will be sufficient to ensure that any required improvements in democratic standards are achieved without recourse to that severe form of action.

We are under no illusions as to the significance of the decision that Council of Europe parliamentarians will need to reach shortly. There are developments that continue to provoke disquiet, some of which have been mentioned. I shall mention two.

The first is Chechnya. We all recall the horrors of the Russian intervention in Chechnya that began just over a year ago. There was something particularly shocking about the brutality of the assault, the disregard for civilian life, the wanton destruction and the sheer incompetence with which the operation was carried out.

It is most regrettable that a negotiated settlement has still not been reached in Chechnya. All hon. Members will be aware that fighting of varying degrees of intensity continues. Particularly violent scenes occurred recently with the capture and recapture of Chechnya's second city, Gudermes. We deplore the civilian casualties which arose from that incident. At the same time, we condemn the most recent terrorist incident in Kislyar. It is welcome news that the majority of the hostages have been released. We hope that the rest—I believe about 150—will also be released unharmed. Those incidents underline the need for a negotiated solution, and also serve to emphasise the difficulties in reaching one.

We shall continue to deprecate violence, and call for a peaceful settlement. We shall continue to call for human rights abuses to be investigated, but the plain fact is that the conditions for a settlement acceptable to both sides have still not been found. Fears for its security made the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe assistance group withdraw to Moscow, but I am pleased to inform the House that it returned to Grozny last weekend.

The second area of concern is Russia's political future. To put it simply, there are those who would prefer Council of Europe membership to be put off at least until after the Russian presidential elections in June. However, despite gloomy predictions to the contrary, the parliamentary elections were held in Russia on 17 December, and they have been unanimously judged as free and fair.

Both my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson) and the hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington) can testify to this. They were official British monitors and Government observers. What is more, assertions about Russian apathy and lack of interest in democracy were confounded by the very substantial turnout of 65 per cent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East has referred to the dangers from nationalists, and in particular from Mr. Zhirinovsky. The communists under Mr. Zyuganov were even more successful in the recent elections. There are very real dangers, and we should not attempt to hide them, but equally we should not adopt an alarmist approach towards them.

While we wish that the Communist party was readier to accept the need for further economic and political reform, it appears to accept the democratic process and the need for Russia's leaders henceforth to be chosen by the ballot box. As long as its leaders do that, there is no reason why the possibility of their coming to power should present an obstacle to Russia's membership of the Council of Europe.

Indeed, to postpone again Russia's membership after elections judged as free and fair would be a humiliating rebuff. It would be bound to strengthen the hand of those who argue that Russia demeans itself by attempting to enter the Council of Europe. It would give fresh force to those Russians who argue that it is not right for Russia to participate in bodies which give foreigners the possibility of interfering in its internal affairs.

Our hope and intention is that membership of the Council of Europe will provide a catalyst for further progress on human rights issues. More generally, both we and our European Union partners favour early Russian accession. The Council of Europe has a crucial role to play in bringing Russia into the European family of nations and as a means to provide practical support in entrenching western values.

It is, of course, for the parliamentarians of the Council of Europe, not for the United Kingdom Government, to determine the outcome of Russia's application during their debate on 25 January. That debate will be conducted with the full participation of the United Kingdom delegation, led by Lord Finsberg, to whom I should like to pay great tribute. I had many dealings with him when he was a Minister in the House. He was a superb Minister, and he does this job equally well.

Mr. Gill: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I am afraid that I do not have time to do so.

The Government would welcome a positive recommendation from that debate, which will allow the Russian Federation to join the main stream of European life, through the Council of Europe. A Europe in which Russia adheres fully to Council of Europe ideals and plays a positive and constructive part in the activities of that organisation will be a safer, freer and happier place.

Royal Irish Regiment

1.29 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I am privileged to have the opportunity to raise this subject. In doing so, I must in the first instance pay tribute to the work of the Royal Irish Regiment and its predecessor, the Ulster Defence Regiment, for serving the people of Northern Ireland and of the United Kingdom as a whole.

I am equally aware that, as more than 40,000 soldiers served in the regiments, there are likely to be some who did not match up to the required standards. Nevertheless, I am convinced that the overwhelming majority served faithfully, displaying remarkable courage, loyalty and devotion to duty. They did not have changes that Regular Army regiments have. Whether the latter came for three-month, six-month or two-year spells of duty, there was always a change, but soldiers in the Royal Irish Regiment, as in the Ulster Defence Regiment, were on duty virtually 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and lived in the communities they served. They and their families were, accordingly, constant targets.

In that context, I must raise some concerns that have surfaced among some constituents, which have been shared by colleagues in my party as we have discussed the matter. My hon. Friend the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) mentioned one of his constituents, whose commanding officer had assured him that he would be retained until a particular date. The CO was transferred and the new CO saw no reason to stand by the commitment. Chancy decisions have kept coming to light and raised concern.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) shares cases with us, as some of the rest of us have discovered, in which the tendency has been for soldiers to be discharged, as far as we can discover, only through guilt by association because somewhere along the line a relative had some strange connections. For example, a Scotsman who had served for years in the regiment was discharged—apparently because a distant relative had been brought on a charge before the courts many years previously and been acquitted. We suspect that that was the only reason for his discharge.

I shall illustrate my argument with the cases of three constituents. The first is Private A. C. I recognise that all Members of Parliament face the difficulty of delays in responses to correspondence. I wrote to this soldier's commanding officer on 6 February 1995. I was speedily acknowledged in a letter dated 8 February, which contained the information that the case was going to regimental headquarters—the focus for such matters. On 28 April, Lord Henley responded from the Ministry of Defence, simply to confirm that the soldier's

"services were no longer required".

Private A. C. had put in for a non-commissioned officer course and was recommended for it. Under section 9.414 of the Queen's regulations of 1985, he was simply discharged. Lord Henley assured me that there was

"no question of stigma being attached".

In a small community where people know one another quite intimately, whether as serving members of the regiment, relatives or neighbours, how could no stigma be attached when no rational explanation for the discharge was forthcoming?

Private A. C. refused to sign the form for his discharge. Recruitment to the regiment was still going on and, although a part-timer, he was on full-time duties. When I pressed the Department, Earl Howe responded, on 28 September, concerning the discharge on 27 February, saying that there was

"no reason to suppose that the necessity for his discharge will have altered. For that reason I am afraid I can see no useful purpose in encouraging him to apply for re-enlistment".

How can one claim that no stigma is attached to a person who is discharged in such circumstances? He was even barred from applying for re-enlistment. As the old statement has it, there is something rotten in the state of Denmark, and the matter raises concern.

What a way that was to treat someone who has served his country. It reminds us of the heroes of the 1914-18 war, when it was Tommy this and Tommy that, but when they came back it was tommyrot, was it not?

The second case is that of W. D., who joined on a part-time basis in October 1972. He rose to the rank of sergeant in October 1979 and was made redundant from his civilian job in 1984. At that point, he was asked to become OPS/maintenance, with full-time hours, but still on a part-time contract. Throughout his service, his confidentials never fell below "Very Good". In 1985, he suffered two aneurisms, which resulted in two operations in 13 weeks. In August 1994, when interviewed by his officer commanding, he was told that he would not be signed on again in October 1994, although, interestingly enough, another officer took him back for six months to work in the officer commanding's office.

In October 1994, W. D. was still three years under the upper age limit. At the same time, a corporal of the same age and in the same circumstances, was signed on for one year. That was the norm for those over 50 years of age with medicals—they were signed on yearly until the upper limit.

W. D's discharge declared him fit for a job in the RIR, but not for his civilian trade, which had been that of a welder-steelworker. When asked to sign the reason for his discharge, he wrote

"made redundant after 22½ years service".

As I understand it—the Minister may be in a position to clarify and confirm—the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993 provided for application of certain parts, for example section 31 of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978, to the armed forces. No enabling order has been made to implement that, however. Why not? Is that a way of saving money at the expense of those who have already served the kingdom for a comparative pittance?

If the relevant legislation had been in operation, it would have enforced the EC rules maintaining that there should be no difference between part-time and full-time workers. It should be emphasised that, although on a part-time contract, Sergeant W. D. had been working full-time hours since becoming OPS/maintenance in the regiment, working between 48 and 56 hours per week. The regiment advertises under an equal opportunities banner, but in cases such as this it seeks cover under servant of the Crown legislation.

Having pressed the matter because I was concerned about it, I received a response from the Minister of State for Defence Procurement. In a letter dated 29 August, he

admitted that W. D. did not have a clean bill of health, and had been medically downgraded to a category below the minimum necessary for retention in the Army. He further stated:

"he left on completion of his engagement on 25 April 1995".

W. D. did not have much option; he was not re-engaged.

The letter continued:

"a former part-time member of the Home Service element of the Royal Irish Regiment, Mr. D. is ineligible for a redundancy package".

As W. D. had been working full-time hours on a part-time contract, the Ministry did not consider it worth while to compensate him for his discharge.

It was interesting to discover that W. D. was not medically downgraded in November 1984 and January 1995 after his operations; he was re-engaged for successive three-year periods in 1985, 1988 and 1991, and for six months in October 1994. In a letter dated 6 November 1995, Earl Howe admitted that W. D. had been medically downgraded, but claimed that his condition—largely attributable to smoking—did not merit a medical discharge. Perhaps I have a simple mind, but the reasoning appears twisted; perhaps the Minister can help me to unravel it. If W. D. had a medical condition and was not fit to continue, surely he could have been medically discharged and thus have qualified, if not for redundancy, at least for a pension after the service that he had given the regiment.

Would it be possible for W. D. to be supplied with his medical notes? Having requested such notes on behalf of a constituent in similar circumstances, I was denied them on grounds of confidentiality, but I had requested them not for myself but for a patient, and I believe that patients' notes are no longer confidential to doctors.

The third case that I wish to raise is rather different. It concerns someone whom I shall call J. G. My investigation revealed a degree of contradiction between the view of the commanding officer and the regiment, and that of the soldier concerned. The case, however, belongs to a category that causes considerable concern. The number of part-time members of the regiment was being reduced, usually on grounds of residence, when it was claimed that the soldiers concerned posed a security risk. J. G. found that unacceptable, as do I. He had served in North Antrim, but was then transferred to Belfast—to my constituency, in fact. While he was working there, it was suggested that he posed a security risk in the area, but if a volunteer accepts the risks involved I must be persuaded that he or she should not be allowed to serve. Indeed, people in such circumstances can often pick up information that is vital to the security services.

This case appears to involve a clash between a serving soldier and an officer. I do not refer to the commanding officer. I received letters about the case from the then Minister of State for the Armed Forces, the right hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley). Only because I continued to press the matter did I receive a glimmer of information, suggesting that J. G.'s failing could have been an over-enthusiastic commitment to his regiment. He was not prepared to hide his membership of what he considered to be a proud regiment in which he was doing useful work.

That resulted in a 25-minute interview that was described as unfortunately becoming confrontational. Only three months earlier, however, the commanding officer involved had commended J. G. for his work on a course in England following a letter to the CO from the Chief Constable praising J. G.'s role in a bomb disposal incident.

I believe that those three examples may be repeated throughout Northern Ireland. If someone is not doing his work properly, a good employer should sack him, giving reasons; but something is wrong when an employer suddenly dispenses with people whose work has been commended, and gives no adequate reason. It appears that soldiers in the RIR and UDR who had given long and faithful service have been released as part of a money-saving exercise. Those soldiers were not overly well paid for the hours that they served. It is scandalous if they were discharged on questionable grounds, and if those who were medically unfit for Army duties were not given proper pensions or redundancy payments.

Finally, may I ask the Minister whether a study akin to that into the Royal Ulster Constabulary is being carried out into the future role of the Royal Irish Regiment? I should like to think that a regiment that has played a useful part in the service of the country during a period of internal trouble, and whose main company is working with the rest of the Army, can continue to give service in Her Majesty's forces.

1.47 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) for giving us an opportunity to reflect on the Royal Irish Regiment and the exceptionally valiant service that it and its predecessors—the Ulster Defence Regiment and the Royal Irish Rangers—have given the Crown over the past 25 years. It is especially welcome, given that we have only just passed the 25th anniversary of the mustering of the UDR in 1970.

The Royal Irish Regiment is a young regiment by Army standards. It was formed only in 1992 by the amalgamation of the Royal Irish Rangers—itself created as recently as 1968, although with far older antecedents in the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, the Royal Ulster Rifles and the Royal Irish Fusiliers—with the UDR. It is also the largest infantry regiment in the British Army, and contains the largest infantry battalion in the Army, the 3rd Royal Irish at Portadown.

The regiment is unique for other reasons, including its mixture of general service and home service battalions and the prominent and extraordinarily valued role played by part-time soldiers.

The operations of the Royal Irish Regiment and its predecessors have been of a quality, standard and challenge that is unique in all Army services. Its role was, and is, to serve alongside the general service battalions of the Army in their support of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. The regiment recruits from the local community, with service restricted to Northern Ireland. The local affiliations are clearly discernable in the structure of the six Royal Irish home service battalions, each with its own tactical area of responsibility exactly aligned with RUC divisional boundaries.

The hon. Gentleman is keenly aware that the 7th Royal Irish is based in his constituency. We therefore acknowledge his expertise in these matters. Although

[Mr. Nicholas Soames]

soldiers in the UDR were subject to Queen's regulations, their unique role and the nature of their terms and conditions of service meant that Queen's regulations needed to be supplemented to reflect the differences between the UDR and the Regular Army. When the Royal Irish Regiment was formed in July 1992, it became an integral part of the Regular Army for the first time.

Before continuing, I wish to pay tribute to the dedication and exceptional bravery of members of both the Ulster Defence Regiment and the home service battalions of the Royal Irish Regiment in performing their difficult, dangerous, but always vital, task. They have acted in a way which people on this side of the water cannot understand, in circumstances sometimes so awful that they are impossible to describe, and with such gallantry that anyone who knew his or her true history would feel humble before it. They have made a huge and invaluable contribution to bringing about the current improved conditions in Northern Ireland.

The House should never forget that home service soldiers, by the very nature of their duty, live as part of the community that they protect, possibly even sharing their daytime work places with members of terrorist organisations. They have placed themselves and their families at enormous risk in their commitment to the fight against terrorism and we must never lose sight of the fact that, over the past 25 years, 201 members of the Ulster Defence Regiment and the Royal Irish Regiment have died as a result of terrorist action. A further 49 ex-regiment soldiers were murdered after leaving the Army and many, many more have been wounded or injured. The whole House will wish to join me in paying tribute to their memory.

The hon. Member for Belfast, South said that it has been suggested that there is some kind of hidden agenda to run down the home service element of the Royal Irish Regiment. I know that that is a matter of concern to the hon. Gentleman and that he and some of his colleagues have maintained, correctly, a steady examination of our commitment to the home service battalions. He should have no fears on that count. I give him a categorical assurance that a rundown of the home service battalions of the Royal Irish Regiment is simply not on the agenda.

I understand, however, how the hon. Gentleman's concerns may have arisen. Regrettably, and despite all our efforts, there has been a gradual decline in strength, particularly of part-time soldiers, from a high point in the 1970s. Full-time strength has been virtually unchanged until recently, when recruiting has suffered from the same problems as affect the Army as a whole, particularly the infantry. There has, however, been a drop of about 8 per cent. in part-time numbers, amounting to a decline of about 200 each year.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I appreciate the point that the Minister of State has made, but I have been told that there are applications to join the regiment part time but that the regiment cannot cope with the numbers.

Mr. Soames: If I may carry on and develop my argument, I hope to cover all the points that the hon. Gentleman has made.

During the past 12 months, 57 full-time and 285 part-time members of the regiment have been discharged for all reasons, including completion of service, voluntary retirement and on medical or disciplinary grounds.

The main burden of the hon. Gentleman's speech was connected with discharges on administrative grounds. It is a complex and difficult area and I shall try to answer in full the points that he made. He will understand that I cannot deal with individual cases. He drew attention to a number of soldiers in the Royal Irish Regiment who have been administratively discharged under section 9.414 of the Queen's regulations. That section, in common with the similar provision in the UDR regulations before it, is a catch-all for discharges that do not come under other, more clearly defined, sections.

Administrative discharge may be used in the Army's interests in a variety of circumstances, including temperamental unsuitability or failure to meet basic training or fitness requirements. It may also be invoked at a soldier's request and has been used where individuals have been misinformed about their circumstances or terms and conditions of service; or where an individual has concerns for the safety of his or her family because of the nature of his or her employment in the Army.

I should also make it clear that the section applies, like all others in the Queen's regulations, across the whole of the Regular Army, and it is always applied with great care. In every case, soldiers can see the application for discharge and individuals are given an opportunity to discuss the application with their commanding officer. In every case, soldiers are given at least 48 hours in which to take advice and consider whether to make a statement about the application for discharge. All this is carefully considered by the brigade commander before the papers are submitted to the Ministry of Defence for final decision. It is an elaborate procedure—deliberately so—to ensure that the individual's interests are taken into full consideration.

In a handful of cases, security implications may prevent full disclosure to the soldier of the exact details of the reasons for discharge. The hon. Gentleman will not expect me to go into further detail, but I give him my assurance that, on the rare occasions when they occur, such cases are given the most thorough scrutiny and must be completely justified before action is taken to discharge a soldier.

Soldiers leave the Army for many reasons, mainly at their own request. The policy on discharge is applied evenly across the whole Army according to the same regulations and policies. There is no policy to apply section 9.414 more rigorously or frequently in the Royal Irish Regiment, whether general service, home service, full time or part time, than in the rest of the Army.

In the Army as a whole, that type of administrative discharge was used in some 800 cases last year. Just four of them were in the home service battalions of the Royal Irish Regiment. It is a mechanism that is used when it is appropriate to the circumstance, no more and no less.

I cannot debate individual cases across the Floor of the House, not least because I do not know the details. If the hon. Member chooses to get in touch with me, I shall happily have them investigated. He mentioned pensions. Because soldiers of the home service battalions were required to serve only in Northern Ireland, their terms and conditions of service in the UDR were structured differently from those for soldiers with a global commitment to service. I recognise that the alignment of the two systems has created anomalies and problems, and I have a great deal of sympathy on that score.

Between 1970 and 1977, all members of the UDR completing five years' service were eligible for a pension payable on reaching 55 years of age. From 1977, all new

members of the UDR and, from 1992 of the Royal Irish Regiment, have been subject to the terms of the armed forces pension scheme. Under those terms, payment of an immediate pension before the age of 60 requires completion of 22 years' service.

In normal circumstances, soldiers in the regiment can expect their service to end after a maximum of 22 years. Those with fewer than 22 years' service but more than two are also eligible for a pension, the size of which depends on their length of service, but it is payable on reaching the age of 60.

We recognise that there are problems. Where possible, we seek to ensure that individuals' needs are met through extensions of service, if necessary to the age of 60, provided that they are fit, there is work for them to do, and they are not blocking the structure of the regiment. Yesterday, I received the Duke of Abercorn and Sir Dennis Faulkner to discuss one or two of those questions, on which they made the most robust and powerful representations. We shall deal with them carefully and in detail.

Re-engagement has never been an automatic right and it has, rightly, always been at the discretion of commanding officers. It will remain necessary to balance the wishes of individuals against the needs of the service. I know that applications for extensions of service up to a total of 22 years will be dealt with sympathetically, but I would not wish to bind the hands of those in command with any general undertaking.

However, I hope that, in future, when employability in future is considered, it will be done across the regiment rather than on a battalion basis. My Department is looking carefully at how that might be done.

I hope that I have been able to demonstrate the continued importance of the home service element of the Royal Irish Regiment in maintaining security in Northern Ireland. I have stated unequivocally that there is absolutely no policy of deliberately running down the home service strength. Indeed, I ask hon. Members from the Province to draw the attention of their constituents, male and female, Catholic and Protestant, to the value of service in the Royal Irish Regiment and the many splendid opportunities that such service can provide for the attainment of recognised qualifications.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's concerns about some individual cases and I shall deal with those as sympathetically as I can if he will raise them in detail with me.

May I conclude with my own warm tribute to the Royal Irish Regiment? No other regiment in the British Army has a contemporary record of such gallantry and distinction. The House will wish to salute it and all its deeds.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Human Rights

1. **Dr. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to recommend derogations from any of the United Kingdom's international human rights commitments. [6838]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Sir Nicholas Bonsor): I apologise for the absence of my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary who, as the House will know, is in the far east.

We have no current plans for derogations beyond those already in force for the European convention on human rights and the international covenant on civil and political rights.

Dr. Wright: I am grateful to the Minister. Why have the Government felt it necessary to start launching attacks on the European convention on human rights, and on the European Court of Human Rights simply because they do not like some of its recent judgments? If the Government take that approach to their human rights obligations, how can they go to China and instruct the Chinese in the importance of human rights, and how can they encourage central eastern European countries to join the Council of Europe? Instead of attacking the convention, would not it be better to show virtue and incorporate it into our law?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I found the speech that the hon. Gentleman took the opportunity to make very illuminating. Can I take it that the hon. Gentleman thinks that the court's judgment on the Gibraltar affair was correct? Conservative Members believe that it was a disgraceful judgment, and we deeply resent it. However, the European convention on human rights is a different issue. The Government support the European convention, as the hon. Gentleman well knows. We believe that it is important, and we have not attacked it. We intend to continue to support the convention fully and, indeed, we have just signed up to do so for the next five years.

Mr. Galloway: How can the Minister expect the House to take him seriously when he talks about Britain's human rights commitments when, in every country in the world, there is editorial discussion today about the act of shameful obeisance to the Saudi royal dictatorship in Riyadh of which the Government are guilty? Does not the leaked Vickers memorandum demonstrate that the British security services, British Ministers and British gun salesmen have been involved in a conspiracy against human rights in the case of Professor Muhammad al-Masari?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I wondered when the hon. Gentleman was going to get to the point of his question. I believe that the majority of the British people would fully support the action that the Government have taken in the case of Dr. al-Masari. He came here using false papers, under false pretences, and he has used our hospitality to try to pull down a friendly regime. If the Saudi regime were to fall, and instability were to occur in the middle east, that would not be in the interests of the United Kingdom and the free west. So the hon. Gentleman's question is entirely misplaced.

Mr. Trimble: I am glad to hear the Minister say that the Government support the European convention on human rights. Does the Minister realise that all the major constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland have supported the incorporation of the European convention into domestic law? Does he also realise that, during the recent inter-party talks process, the Northern Ireland Office appeared to support incorporation at one stage?

In my party, we share the Minister's concern over recent decisions of the European Court, especially on the Gibraltar matter. That decision was falsely represented as a ruling that the actions of the SAS were a breach of the convention, which they were not—there was an adverse finding on one minor aspect of that controversial case. Has any thought been given in the Council of Europe to a way in which individual decisions and controversial issues—no court is perfect and there are good reasons to believe that the European Court erred on that point—can be considered further?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I note what the hon. Gentleman says in regard to the convention on human rights and his wish to incorporate it into domestic law. The Government do not wish to fetter the right of the House in that manner but, as I said, we fully support the convention on human rights and all that flows from it.

In regard to the hon. Gentleman's other points, it is extremely important that what happens in Northern Ireland is fully within the scope of the convention on human rights. The Government will ensure that it is.

Russia

2. **Mr. Etherington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about Britain's relations with Russia. [6839]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We enjoy a close and co-operative partnership with Russia.

Mr. Etherington: Will the Minister assure the House, in view of the escalating danger in Chechnya, which has been worsened by the hostage crisis this week, that the Government will use every endeavour to urge restraint on both sides in the dispute to try to bring about a peaceful settlement? Will he state what is being done in terms of European security to try to ensure that the situation does not escalate further? Will he guarantee to the House that regardless of commercial considerations, human rights will be paramount?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I can certainly assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government will do everything that they can to help to bring the Chechen problem to a peaceful solution. It is important that that should be so. There was a debate on Russia in the House at 1 pm and if the hon. Gentleman had attended it, he would have heard that point expounded in greater detail. I assure him that it is extremely important that human rights remain paramount. The Government will do everything they can to ensure that that is the case.

Mr. Elletson: What effect has the war in Chechnya had on Britain's relations with Russia? Does my hon. Friend agree that while Russia's brutal campaign in Chechnya

continues, it would be wrong—indeed, it would be nothing short of appeasement—to reward its leaders and its Government with membership of the Council of Europe?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: My hon. Friend was present in the debate earlier. He and other hon. Members may like to refresh their memories from *Hansard*. The Chechnya problem is terrible. The behaviour of the Russian forces was bad and the behaviour of some of the rebels has also been bad. We have condemned both sides in the war equally. We wish the matter to be brought to a peaceful solution as soon as possible.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Does the Minister agree that although Russia, by reason of its history, its size and its influence, should enjoy special status, United Kingdom policy should be based on the legitimate expectation that the programme of economic and political reform will be continued? Will the Government support that programme rather than any named individual?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I assure the hon. and learned Gentleman that the Government will do everything that they can to support the programme of reform.

Council of Ministers

3. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received in favour of an extension of qualified majority voting in the Council of Ministers. [6840]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. David Davis): Several other member states have told us that they favour more majority voting in the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Whittingdale: Will my hon. Friend give an absolute assurance that a Conservative Government will not agree to any extension of qualified majority voting? Will he contrast that with the policy of the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats which would lead to the abandonment of the British veto and a further erosion of the sovereignty of this Parliament?

Mr. Davis: I can give a categorical assurance. We have made it clear that we oppose a further extension of qualified majority voting. We have heard the arguments of those who wish to see an erosion of the national veto, including those from the Opposition. We are not persuaded. We also note that their various arguments conceal many differences of view about the areas in which they wish to abandon unanimity. We can be clear on this: we will not give up our veto.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: Does the Minister recognise that the only advantage, in many cases, of retaining qualified majority voting arises when the United Kingdom finds itself in a minority? In those cases when it is necessary to make alliances, and when there is a majority opinion supporting very great changes on matters such as the transport of animals, it is important to make alliances. Are not there cases in which majority voting would assist the United Kingdom rather than the contrary?

Mr. Davis: When we came to our decision on that policy, we made a careful assessment and undertook the type of analysis that the hon. Gentleman has presented, of occasions when it is to our advantage to have majority voting and when it is not to our advantage. I made the comment that I just made, on the basis of that assessment.

Mr. Wilkinson: While I welcome my hon. Friend's comments as far as they go, may I say to him that some aspects of qualified majority voting are fundamentally flawed and perverse? For example, on fishing policy, landlocked nations have a say on fishing in what should be our waters. Will my hon. Friend give his hon. Friends an assurance that Her Majesty's Government will seek to roll back that insidious process?

Mr. Davis: What I can assure my hon. Friend is that we understand only too well the worries about fishing policy and some of its inefficiencies. It does not necessarily help us to have unanimity in that aspect of policy. There are policy areas in which it can work the other way against us. However, we are very clear in our minds that that is a matter that needs examining.

Ms Quin: Given that the Government had previously favoured a substantial increase in majority voting, especially at the time of the Single European Act but also at the time of the Maastricht treaty, will the Minister confirm that a change in policy has taken place, and that he is saying that now there are absolutely no circumstances in which the Government would envisage further majority voting, even if that meant blocking or jeopardising the enlargement of the European Union, which we all want?

Mr. Davis: The hon. Lady obviously was not listening to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones). I said clearly that we made that judgment on the basis of what was in the British national interest. That is a judgment that assesses every sector of European policy and decides whether it is right to have what we have now. We decided that we do not want majority voting to be progressed any further. The hon. Lady's suggestion that that will somehow block the enlargement process appears to me completely misconceived.

European Union

4. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to visit the European Parliament to discuss developments in the European Union. [6841]

Mr. David Davis: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary hopes to visit the European Parliament in the first half of 1996.

Mr. Marshall: The Government have said that they wish the European Parliament to concentrate on tackling fraud and waste in the European budget. When the Secretary of State next visits the European Parliament, will he therefore explain why he is opposing the proposals to allow Members of the European Parliament to amend wasteful agricultural spending, which accounts for the majority of fraud in the European budget and adds an estimated £20 a week to the tax and food bill of an average family of four in this country? How does opposing such a measure accord with Britain's national interest?

Mr. Davis: The hon. Gentleman makes an extraordinary presumption about which way the European Parliament would vote on such matters. It has not exactly been inclined to vote in favour of economy in the past. We have criticised the European Parliament in the past for not using the powers that it has. It has just commissioned its temporary commission of inquiry, and we commend it for that.

Mr. Cash: What will the Government's policy be with regard to the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General, which has been placed in the Library of the House of Commons, regarding fraud in the European Community, and the recommendation of improvement in the scrutiny processes that that report contains? Will he also consider whether we shall have a White Paper in the near future?

Mr. Davis: My hon. Friend attempts to pre-empt another hon. Member's question later on the Order Paper, and I shall answer that in due course. My hon. Friend knows that we have been vigorous in opposition to the items that cause fraud and in promoting measures to tackle fraud, and we shall continue with that vigour in future.

Cambodia

5. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his EC colleagues regarding the situation in Cambodia; and if he will make a statement. [6842]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): Cambodia has been discussed recently both in multilateral discussions with EU partners and bilaterally with individual countries. We are working for continued political and economic reform there.

Mr. Mullin: Has the Minister noticed that Cambodia is slipping back into some of its bad old habits? I think, for instance, of the former Foreign Minister who was arrested a couple of months ago; of democratically elected members of the National Assembly who dissent from the Government line being illegally expelled from that assembly; and of high-level corruption. Will he make it clear to the Cambodian Government that, while the international community is willing to do its best to fund the introduction of democracy to Cambodia, it is not willing to fund another tyranny?

Mr. Hanley: I very much agree with the hon. Gentleman. We are of course keeping a close eye on developments in Cambodia, and we hope that the Cambodian Government will take careful note of the resolution passed by the United Nations General Assembly in December which highlights the importance of good governance, the rule of law, multi-party democracy, freedom of expression and the protection of human rights. I am also well aware of the arrest of Prince Sirivudh, who I believe is now in Paris.

Intergovernmental Conference

7. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Foreign Ministers of the other European Union countries about the preparations for the intergovernmental conference. [6844]

Mr. David Davis: Preparations for the intergovernmental conference were discussed most recently at the Madrid Council on 15 and 16 December.

Mr. Hain: What proposals does the Minister plan to put to the IGC for tackling fraud in Europe? After the November Court of Auditors report on the scandalous amount of fraud in the European budget, is there not a strong case for increasing the anti-fraud powers of European institutions; or will the Minister and the Government be blocked from doing that by following Mrs. Thatcher's lurch to the right and backing their right-wing extremists, instead of defending the interests of British taxpayers?

Mr. Davis: Had the hon. Gentleman read the report carefully, he would have seen that there is much less fraud in this country than in most other European countries, and that we control it more effectively than any other country. He cannot therefore take that line.

As to the lurch to the right, I shall leave it to another party to deal with.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: When considering preparations for the IGC, does my hon. Friend agree that the doctrine of subsidiarity ought to be used not merely to stop additional powers going to Europe but to look at existing European powers, thereby reducing the so-called acquis communautaire? Does he agree that that would be to the advantage of parliamentary government in this country, and to the advantage of Great Britain?

Mr. Davis: My hon. Friend is exactly right: that is what has been happening. An Anglo-German and an Anglo-French list of such measures have been looked at. In the past year, 61 regulations have been removed; in July alone, 14 were removed from the energy sector. The attempt to reduce and to roll back the amount of regulation coming from Europe is very much in line with British Government policy.

Mr. Radice: Has the Minister noted a Gallup poll carried out for the European Movement showing that 56 per cent. of respondents want closer co-operation with our European partners, with Britain playing a leading role?

Mr. Davis: Unlike the Labour party, we do not devise our policies from Gallup polls. The analysis to which the hon. Gentleman refers showed a number of other things too. It showed that a majority supported the Government's line of keeping open their options on monetary union—a point that the hon. Gentleman seems not to have noticed.

Mr. Jenkin: Speaking of polls, may I draw my hon. Friend's attention to various Confederation of British Industry polls showing that, although people may want to keep open the option on the single currency, they are also against further and unnecessary integration with Europe? Can he explain how we can have a single currency without further integration in Europe? Do not these findings display the shortcomings of opinion polls?

Mr. Davis: I am entirely with my hon. Friend in the matter of the shortcomings of opinion polls. I shall not attempt today a lecture on the constitutional implications of a single currency—save to say that all these points reinforce the wisdom of the Prime Minister's securing an opt-out for Britain at Maastricht.

Mr. MacShane: As the Minister seeks to navigate through the shoals and currents of the intergovernmental conference process, does he find helpful the statement from Japan by his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence that pro-European Tory Members should leave the party?

Mr. Davis: The hon. Gentleman should quote more accurately—even remotely accurately might be helpful. The Japanese understand only too well that our commitment to a European single market, in conjunction with deregulation and the commitment to competitiveness, leads them to invest most of their investment in Europe in this country.

Political Union

9. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet his counterparts in the European Union to discuss greater political union. [6846]

Mr. David Davis: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has had regular discussions with his European Union counterparts on a wide range of issues of common interest.

Sir David Knox: Does my hon. Friend agree that Britain can exert much more influence in the world and so protect British interests much better if we act in conjunction with our European Union partners, rather than try to go it alone?

Mr. Davis: My hon. Friend will be unsurprised to hear that I agree with him. This summer and autumn, a large number of newspaper headlines, referring to my work on the reflection group, said that Britain was isolated on this, that or the other, but when those same journalists approached reflection group members and said, "Did you not find Britain obstructionist?" the response was, "No. Britain was extremely constructive in its approach." That is yielding dividends in a variety of areas, which I shall come to later.

Mr. McAvoy: The Minister has been disingenuous in his response to the point about the Secretary of State for Defence's statements. Bearing in mind the comments made by the main questioner, does not the Minister accept that such divisions within this country's governing party damage this country's interests when he represents it in Europe?

Mr. Davis: Our European allies understand only too well the British Government's position, but, if anyone is being disingenuous, it is the hon. Gentleman. Perhaps he should have been here just before Christmas to watch the interesting sight of the Labour Front-Bench team putting one policy and everyone else on the Labour Benches putting another. They cannot talk to us about division in our party.

Mr. Dykes: As the Minister has a new year's resolution to be enthusiastic about our European Union membership, will he say in detailed aspects how that enthusiasm will be expressed in the coming months?

Mr. Davis: I am tempted to say, "In the Division Lobby," but I shall not. One of the ways in which that enthusiasm is manifesting itself is in promoting our view of what is best for the European Union. That involves a Europe that is decentralised, has a high competitiveness level, is deregulated and respects nation states' rights. All those matters are good not just for Britain, but for Europe.

Famagusta

10. **Mr. O'Hara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his policy for the future of Famagusta. [6847]

Mr. David Davis: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the remarks that I made closing the debate on Famagusta in the House on 29 November. He will remember that, at that time, I spoke at some length.

Mr. O'Hara: I thank the Minister for that answer. Will he please take the opportunity to reaffirm that Her Majesty's Government will not allow the negotiations for Cyprus's accession to full European Community membership to depend on a prior solution to the Cyprus problem and, furthermore, that he will not countenance any solution to the problem that is not based on one nation state's undivided sovereignty in the island of Cyprus?

Mr. Davis: What I shall say to the hon. Gentleman is that we will allow no one outside the European Union to veto that process by their actions, but Union accession is designed to help with the solution to the division of Cyprus—the Cyprus problem—rather than to hinder it.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend accept that great concern exists among hon. Members on both sides of the House about Cyprus's continued division? Is not it a gross denial of human rights that ordinary Cypriots can stand outside Famagusta and see their family homes, which have been in their family for many generations but in which they have not been allowed to live for more than 21 years?

Mr. Davis: I hear and understand all too well what my hon. Friend says. The British Government have played, and continue to play, an active role in endeavouring to find a solution to that grievous problem. Famagusta is only too sad a symbol of that problem.

Mr. John D. Taylor: On the assumption that the question refers not to the city of Famagusta but to the empty properties in its suburbs, can the Minister confirm that Her Majesty's Government will bring every pressure to bear upon the Greek Cypriot Administration to accept and bring into operation the recommendations of the United Nations for confidence-building measures to allow people back into the empty suburbs, such measures having already been accepted by the Turkish Cypriots?

Mr. Davis: I do not intend to pick and choose between sides in this issue. Her Majesty's Government will continue, as we have already, to bring every pressure to bear to bring about the development of the confidence-building measures in Varosha or new Famagusta, as the right hon. Gentleman wishes to call it.

National Parliaments

11. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received about greater participation by national Parliaments in the affairs of (a) the European Community and (b) the European Union respectively; and what response he has given. [6848]

Mr. David Davis: We have discussed the role of national Parliaments in the European Union directly with

other member states and within the reflection group. We have made it clear that Her Majesty's Government are in favour of an increased role for national Parliaments in the European Union.

Mr. Spearing: Does the Minister agree that paragraph 14 of the Government's response to the Select Committee on European Legislation about the place of national Parliaments says that

"national parliaments are, and must remain, the primary focus of democratic legitimacy"?

Can the Minister explain, therefore, why, by coincidence, Command Paper 3050, which is a convention of 47 articles establishing a European police office and which has been laid on the Table under the Ponsonby rule, has just a reference in the appendix to the votes and proceedings and has now had about 10 days out of the 21 before it is ratified? Would not it be right for the Minister to approach the Leader of the House to suggest that we debate that convention next week? Unless we do so, the Government will be seen to be saying one thing and doing another.

Mr. Davis: I commend the hon. Gentleman on the cleverness and ingenuity of his question. He knows only too well that we fought very hard to ensure that proper notice is given of measures under the European Community and the other pillars. I shall look at the matter and see what can be done to expedite scrutiny. I cannot be drawn beyond that.

Mr. Congdon: Does my hon. Friend agree that passing legislation is a key role of national Parliaments? Does he share my concern at the continued encroachment of the European Court in legislation passed by the House when it has retrospectively overridden the wishes of the House? What do the Government intend to do about that?

Mr. Davis: My hon. Friend has a point in his concern about retrospective overriding by the European Court of matters upon which the House has decided. However, we are signed up to the treaty and we expect the rule of law to apply to other countries in Europe. My hon. Friend may be aware that within the reflection group Britain has asked that we consider the possibility of limiting the retrospectivity of European Court judgments so as to make them more predictable and acceptable to the nation states of Europe.

Mr. Sheerman: If we want national parliamentarians to have more access to and involvement in Europe, would not it be a good idea for the Government to back a move for a centre in Brussels where national parliamentarians could have meetings, make common cause with each other and have simultaneous translations, which would make that accessibility a reality? Will the Minister join in that campaign?

Mr. Tony Banks: I feel another junket coming on.

Mr. Davis: The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) has it right; there could be another junket coming on. Although we are in favour of greater democracy and despite the fact that an arrangement already exists whereby the House will fund visits to European institutions, I do not see a great deal of benefit from the hon. Gentleman's proposal.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: The question refers to

"participation by national Parliaments in the affairs of (a) the European Community and (b) the European Union".

Would it not be more appropriate for the people of this country to be consulted about the European Community and future developments in the European Union? Does my hon. Friend accept that the only way to do that would be to hold a referendum on future political integration within the European Union?

Mr. Davis: The House is elected to represent the people of this country, and few people do it more vocally than my hon. Friend. As my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Thatcher said on one occasion, it is for us to take the hard decisions and then to make them stick.

Nigeria

12. **Ms Rachel Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures the Government are taking to put pressure on the military Government in Nigeria. [6849]

Mr. Hanley: Further to the answer given by my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary in the House on 29 November, *Official Report*, column 1180, and my answer of 11 December, *Official Report*, columns 691-92, we have co-sponsored a United Nations General Assembly resolution strongly critical of the military regime in Nigeria, which was adopted with a large majority. On 20 December last, my right hon. and learned Friend attended the first meeting of the Commonwealth ministerial action group, which will follow up on Nigeria's suspension from the Commonwealth.

Ms Squire: Does the Minister agree that the military regime in Nigeria continues to be brutal and ruthless? That was demonstrated only last week with the arrest of the *Financial Times* correspondent Paul Adams for publishing an article on an Ogoni festival. Does the right hon. Gentleman further agree that unless immediate and specific action is taken by the regime to promote democracy and protect human rights, the British Government should impose further sanctions? If so, will he state clearly what action he wants Nigeria to take, and within what time scale, and say what further sanctions his Government will impose if the brutality continues?

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Lady speaks for many hon. Members. We want progress to be made in Nigeria because the current situation is terrible. The United Kingdom is in the forefront of those taking positive steps against the Nigerian regime. I do not need to go into detail on the full list of European measures that we have helped to introduce. We are also in the forefront, together with our Commonwealth partners, in initiating and supporting Nigeria's suspension from the Commonwealth. We have noted the calls to sever trade links and to impose an oil embargo. We are certainly considering a wide range of options with our EU and other partners and we have not ruled out anything at this stage.

Paul Adams, the resident *Financial Times* correspondent in Nigeria, was arrested by the Nigerian state security service in Ogoniland during an Ogoni day rally on 4 January. The consular official has twice visited Mr. Adams in prison. Apparently, he is being well looked after, but he should be released and we are pushing for that to be at an early date. I understand that there has been

some problem with the necessary journalistic documentation, but that is no reason to keep an innocent man in prison.

Mr. King: I want to reinforce what the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire) said about Paul Adams, whose parents are constituents of mine. It appears that he is being held in detention on a very flimsy charge. Will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that the most immediate pressure will be put on the Nigerian Government to release him?

Mr. Hanley: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for raising the subject with me earlier today. I gave him an assurance then, which I repeat now, that we shall do everything that we can to secure the release of Mr. Adams as soon as possible.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Despite what the Minister has said, does he accept that the mixed messages that have emanated from the Government in the past have enabled the Nigerian Government to disregard the normal behaviour of a civilised state, as is shown by the arrest of a British journalist? Will the right hon. Gentleman answer the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire): what is the progress that the Nigerians must make, and within what time scale, that would allow us to accept them back into the family of nations? Conversely, at what stage will the Government decide to lead the demand for effective and meaningful sanctions, including trade sanctions, against Nigeria to ensure that it conforms to acceptable international standards?

Mr. Hanley: We are acting in conjunction with the European Union, our Commonwealth partners, the United Nations and others who are all deeply interested in trying to ensure that the measures that we have taken are effective. We will consider absolutely anything further to ensure that progress is made in Nigeria. I cannot give an exact time scale. That is for others to determine. What we are doing as part of the international initiative is effective. We hope that it will be so effective that Nigeria will return to the Commonwealth as a full member. If she does not, she will certainly be thrown out—and within a time scale with which I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree.

Intergovernmental Conference

13. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's latest proposals for the intergovernmental conference. [6850]

Mr. David Davis: We have set out our approach to the intergovernmental conference on a number of occasions, including during the debate at the Madrid European Council on 7 December. We want an IGC that improves the operation of the European Union, especially with a view to further enlargement, and one that makes the Union more relevant and acceptable to people.

Mr. Winnick: May I make a helpful suggestion to the Government? In order to accommodate both sides of the Tory parliamentary party—the rival factions on this issue—would it not be possible for both sides to be represented at the intergovernmental conference? One side could be led by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the other by the Defence Secretary. Is that not a helpful suggestion?

Mr. Davis: That suggestion is about as helpful as one has come to expect from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Jessel: At the intergovernmental conference, will the Government constantly bear it in mind that the British people want only a minimal share in governing continental countries and want continental countries to have only a minimal share in governing our country?

Mr. Davis: I understand only too well what my hon. Friend is saying. Ironically, there is not too much difference between what he had to say and the comments on the opinion poll made earlier by the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice). British people want the nation state to be respected. They want proper co-operation in Europe, trading opportunities in Europe, peace and stability in Europe and a decentralised Europe. We shall support all those things.

Madam Speaker: Mr. MacKay—I am sorry, Mr. Mackinlay.

Mr. Mackinlay: What opportunities are there for the Governments of countries applying for membership of the European Union to contribute to the intergovernmental conference—especially the Visegrad countries, of which Poland is the largest? Will there be an opportunity for them to make a meaningful contribution to deliberations? In that regard, will the Foreign Secretary or the Prime Minister be meeting the new President of Poland soon?

Mr. Davis: I was surprised to see where the hon. Gentleman was sitting, given how he was addressed.

Mr. Skinner: We are a broad church here.

Mr. Davis: It is a very broad church if it extends as far as the Conservative Whips Office.

With respect to the hon. Gentleman's quite serious question, which I shall treat seriously, the Government have certainly been in communication with all the countries to which he referred—certainly Visegrad 4, Visegrad 6 and the Baltic countries. We shall continue to be in communication with them about their proposals and ideas. Their representatives meet regularly; they have attended meetings of the European Foreign Affairs Council on a number of occasions. We shall certainly be continuing that process and ensuring that their fears and concerns are reflected. Britain will take a very forward role in doing so. As for the hon. Gentleman's comment about a meeting with my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary or my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, I shall have to look into that and let him know.

Mr. Mans: When my hon. Friend attends the IGC and discusses the prospects of future members of the European Union in eastern Europe, will he ensure that our colleagues in Europe appreciate that the security of those future members should be conducted through NATO and not through any future security structure in the EU?

Mr. Davis: My hon. Friend will be only too pleased to know that that point has already been made very forcibly by myself in the reflection group and by my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary in the Western European Union. Our stance on it is very

clear and was laid out in a memorandum written by my right hon. and learned Friend in March. We have stuck forcibly to that point throughout. Article 5 responsibilities—defence responsibilities—must be under NATO and not anything else.

BBC World Service

14. **Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimates have been made of the effects on the operating budget of the BBC World Service of the combined effect of the recent reduction in its capital programme and the proposed introduction of private finance initiative funding. [6851]

Mr. Hanley: The effect of the PFI funding on the World Service budget will be clearer once the World Service completes its discussions with the private sector.

Mr. Dowd: Does the Minister regret the damage that the Government's arbitrary decision to cut both the operating budget and the capital budget of the World Service—in outright defiance of the triennium agreement—has done to its ability to plan for the future? Does he not realise that that will produce total cuts, in real terms, across the World Service's budgets of some £20 million by 1997-98? Does that not conclusively demonstrate that the Government's word is not to be trusted even when they are dealing with an institution such as the BBC World Service, which provides value to the people of Britain that far exceeds its operating costs?

Mr. Hanley: I fully recognise the great value and high quality of the World Service and the important role that it plays in overseas representation. It is not realistic, however, to examine the World Service budget in isolation from the Foreign Office budget as a whole, as the chairman of the BBC has acknowledged.

We have done everything possible to keep reductions in the World Service to the minimum. If one takes both capital and revenue reductions, the average is 4.75 per cent for the World Service while it is 7.0 per cent. for the Foreign Office as a whole. If one takes expenditure for 1996-97, the current expenditure reduction for the World Service is 0 per cent., whereas for the diplomatic wing of the Foreign Office it is 4 per cent. If one takes capital expenditure into account as well, as we said, the PFI will be playing its part.

The Government have favoured the World Service above every other part of the Foreign Office in the current expenditure round.

Mr. Jopling: Will the Minister bear it in mind that recently the BBC seemed sensibly to opt out of paying the huge sums of money required for prestige sporting events? We shall now, for example, be able to watch formula 1 motor racing on ITV—which allegedly paid £70 million over five years for that right—rather than on the BBC. Does not all that add up to the fact that the BBC should have ample savings with which to make up the shortfall for the World Service?

Mr. Hanley: I cannot go along with the argument that my right hon. Friend uses inasmuch as I believe that the World Service, along with the BBC as a whole, has become much more efficient than it was in the past. The World Service has also produced television services the world over at no cost to the British taxpayer, which is a great triumph, and the quality of those programmes is improving daily.

I believe in the investment that we have made in the World Service. It has a capital provision of more than £62 million for the next three years, and expenditure on the Oman relay station will cost £20 million during that period. That is a substantial capital investment. With further efficiency savings, I believe that the World Service will continue to serve us extremely well. On top of that, real terms funding has been increased by 50 per cent. since 1979.

Mr. Shore: The Minister must be aware that the BBC itself does not finance the World Service; it is financed by subventions from the Foreign Office, and always has been. Will the Minister therefore look more carefully now at the case for sustaining the previously budgeted expenditure, not only for this year but for 1997-98? There is a real danger not only that the capital budget will be cut—that will happen anyway and the World Service may or may not be able to make up for it through the PFI—but that the operating budget will be cut. Those of us who heard earlier this year of the end of our 50-year-old radio service to France, which has operated since General de Gaulle first came to Britain in 1940, can only look to the future with great anxiety and wait to see which other services are in danger.

Mr. Hanley: I recognise that some hon. Members have longer memories than others, and can therefore remember the time when the French language service was extremely important. However, the World Service's decision to cut that service has nothing to do with the recent budgetary measures. The decision was taken by the BBC purely on its own merits, and was announced last September. If the right hon. Gentleman wants to fund nostalgia, that is up to him, but the World Service is efficient and effective. I recognise the £10 million funding gap—*[Interruption.]* If Opposition Members take some interest in the subject, they might like to listen to the answer. I am talking about the funding gap in 1997-98. The prediction of that gap is based on several assumptions that remain to be verified. I realise that it will be a difficult year, but I am confident that much can be done to absorb the cuts, especially through further efficiencies.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the BBC World Service acts as a most effective, and cost-effective, ambassador in every home and institution in which it is listened to? Bearing that fact in mind, will he carefully re-examine the figures, especially those for 1997, to ensure that the World Service is not jeopardised for the sake of the price of a mile of motorway?

Mr. Hanley: I can tell my hon. Friend, and I know that he will agree, that the Government have a strong record of support for the World Service. As I said earlier, real terms funding is up by 50 per cent. since 1979. World Service output and audiences now stand at record levels—the audience is more than twice the size of the nearest competitor. The World Service has benefited from an investment of £166 million since 1991, which has greatly improved audibility and efficiency. For example, a new £29 million relay station is nearing completion in Thailand. The World Service is now broadcast in 42 languages, including the 24-hour English output, and

it is rebroadcast by more than 900 local radio stations. That is a record of success. *[Interruption.]* No wonder the Opposition are angry about it.

Mr. Robin Cook: If the World Service is such a success, why are the Government not backing that success? The Minister has just mentioned the 42 languages. Does he not know that this month the World Service is carrying out a review to decide which of those languages it will have to drop in 1997? Which language does the Minister think that the BBC World Service could drop without damaging British influence? If he cannot answer that question, does that not underline how short-sighted it is to cut the funding of one of the great assets of Britain, which should be one of the best investments that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office could make in foreign relations?

Mr. Hanley: I said earlier, and I shall repeat it, that the World Service has done better out of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office public expenditure survey than any other branch. Indeed, the rest of the Foreign Office has had to make sacrifices because of the World Service. Does the hon. Gentleman want to say how much he would spend on the Foreign Office budget and how much extra on the World Service? What allocation would he make for the Foreign Office budget under his Government, if he ever had the chance to form one? I should be interested if he would put the numbers on the line, because we want to know how much extra he would spend.

Mr. Temple-Morris: Does my right hon. Friend accept that, as has already been made clear, it is a matter of major concern on both sides of the House that the operating budget of the BBC World Service for the next triennium is under serious threat? He has waxed eloquent about the achievements of the BBC World Service. As he has the Foreign Office responsibility for that service, will he undertake to protect it, rather than cutting an operation that delivers more for Britain at less cost than almost anything else?

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend's interest in, and support for, the World Service is well known. I am grateful for the discussions that he had with me on the subject before Christmas. As I said, we have protected the World Service from the rigours of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office budget for the coming year. We have favoured it, and to a large extent ring-fenced it, in comparison with expenditure on the British Council, on the diplomatic wing and even on the Overseas Development Administration. In other words, the World Service has done better than any other part of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in funding. That is a recognition of the importance that the World Service holds for the United Kingdom and of the way in which the House regards it.

Intergovernmental Conference

15. **Ms Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he intends to publish a White Paper outlining Her Majesty's Government's priorities for the intergovernmental conference of the European Union. [6852]

Mr. David Davis: The Government have given a clear idea of their approach to the IGC in debates in the House, in Committee appearances and in responses to Committee reports. None the less, we are carefully considering the possibility of a White Paper.

Ms Eagle: Why is the Minister being so coy about a White Paper? The IGC is rapidly approaching, and we should like to know the Government's latest thinking on the issue. Is the Minister worried that, if he dares to publish a White Paper, it will tear his party apart?

Mr. Davis: The hon. Lady should pay attention to the facts. We have had two debates in the House and two debates in the other place, and we have made seven appearances before Select Committees, four responses to Select Committee reports and a large number of other responses to make clear our policy. It is clear, however, that our policy will not include giving up our vetoes on industrial policy, social policy, regional policy and environmental policy. It will not involve our joining the social chapter, nor will it involve this country giving up any other opt-outs. In other words, the policy will not involve the sell-out that the Labour party offers.

Mr. Robin Cook: The Minister has reminded the House that the Labour party has published its detailed policy for the IGC. The Tory Euro-sceptics have published their policy on the IGC, and we understand that the Tory left is to do the same. Is not the only reason why the Government will not tell us whether they will publish a White Paper that they cannot yet work out how to get the separate wings of the Tory party to agree to the same policy? Is it not time that they admitted that a party so divided at home cannot speak with unity for Britain abroad? Should they not stop clinging to office?

Mr. Davis: I commend the hon. Gentleman for his brass neck. He should have looked behind him during the debate that we had before Christmas, when he did not have a single supporter on his own Back Benches. I should ask him about his policy on monetary union. Whom does he support—the leader of the Labour party or the deputy leader, as they have different policies? In every single area of policy, Labour Back-Bench and Front-Bench Members have different views.

Sir Jim Lester: May I commend my hon. Friend for the way in which the Foreign Office has responded to the painstaking work done on the IGC by the Foreign Affairs Select Committee? I suspect that not every hon. Member knows the details of the work that the Committee has undertaken, the capitals that we have visited, and continue to visit, and the reports that we have published. I commend all who are asking questions to go to the Vote Office on their way out and pick up those reports, as they might do rather better than questioning my hon. Friend the Minister.

Mr. Davis: I congratulate my hon. Friend on two counts—first on his personal honour, which was well deserved, and secondly on the commendable work that the Select Committee has undertaken. The Select Committees of this House have done a tremendous job in terms of reviewing the IGC and providing input on the subject.

Mr. Janner: Hear, hear.

Mr. Davis: I was not looking at the hon. and learned Gentleman when I said that. All of the Select Committees deserve congratulations, the Foreign Affairs Committee—of which my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Sir J. Lester) is a member—in particular.

EU Decision Making

18. **Ms Janet Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his European counterparts about the need to reform the European Union's decision-making procedures. [6855]

Mr. David Davis: The decision-making procedures of the European Union have been the subject of discussions in the study group preparing the intergovernmental conference. The Madrid European Council agreed that this should start on 29 March in Turin.

Ms Anderson: What advice has the Minister received about the decision-making procedures within the EU from the Secretary of State for Defence? Does the Minister agree with his right hon. Friend that those who advocate a federal Europe should follow the example of my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) and of the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Miss Nicholson) and leave the Conservative party?

Mr. Davis: I intend to give a serious answer to a not very serious question. The decision-making procedures in the EU are not beyond repair or criticism. One of the items raised in the IGC reflection group, which has looked into this matter in some detail, is the concern that a great deal of blame for the lack of popularity of the EU could be attributed to the complexity of its decision-making procedures.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: Given that reform of decision making at European level raises legitimate concerns not only in the Tory party but in all parties in the House and throughout the country, and given that the Government are so immobilised on the matter that they cannot even publish a White Paper to tell us what they think, would it not make more sense for the Tory party and the Government as well as for the House and the country for the Government to commit themselves, as we have, to a referendum if the outcome of the IGC carries constitutional implications that go beyond the ambit of any one party or Parliament?

Mr. Davis: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it clear that the IGC will not be allowed to carry major constitutional implications, but if it did, he would reconsider the matter.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will my hon. Friend use the IGC to reinforce our ideas on the introduction of regulations and directives—that they should be deregulatory, that subsidiarity should be defined and, above all, that the European Union should use a light touch and publish directives and regulations only when they are really necessary?

Mr. Davis: My hon. Friend summarises well some of the arguments that we have been successful in promoting in the EU in the past few years—in particular, the arguments about subsidiarity and deregulation. As I said, some 61 regulations were removed last year. That effort is continuing. At the Madrid Council, the Commission was required to produce a report with an action plan to carry on removing legislation that is unnecessary and burdensome on industry and to improve the competitiveness of the EU.

Tibet

19. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has recently made to the Chinese Government concerning repression in Tibet. [6856]

Mr. Hanley: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary raised the issue of human rights abuses in Tibet during his discussions with the Chinese Vice-Premier and Foreign Minister, Qian Qichen, in Peking yesterday.

Mr. Sutcliffe: I thank the Minister for that answer. Human rights abuses in Tibet continue, and we have seen human rights abuses by the Chinese come to the forefront again this week. Will the Minister ensure that, in representations to the Chinese Government, Tibet is high on the agenda? As each day goes by, repression in Tibet continues without the world taking any notice.

Mr. Hanley: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. We are deeply concerned about reports of abuses of human rights in Tibet and further afield, including the destruction of religious buildings, the immigration of the Han Chinese, arbitrary security measures and environmental damage. We raise our concerns with the Chinese authorities regularly both nationally and as part of the European Union.

We have a great responsibility for the people of Hong Kong. We must make sure that our relationship with China is as good as possible for the sake of the people of Hong Kong to ensure that there is continuity and the highest degree of autonomy come 1997. However, that has never stopped us raising issues of human rights abuses in China. I was pleased to hear the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) speaking this morning on the radio in exactly the right measured tones about the matter.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Has my right hon. Friend observed newspaper reports on China's apparent neglect, or worse, of the Dalai Lama's chosen successor? Has he been able to make representations to the Government of China in defence of that most important deity?

Mr. Hanley: I certainly have seen reports of that. We regret that the Chinese Government and the Tibetan Buddhist religious leaders, including the Dalai Lama, have been unable to reach agreement on the selection of the new Panchen Lama. It is a matter of great concern.

Mr. Fatchett: On the issue of human rights in Tibet and China, the Minister will be aware of the profound distress caused by the harrowing scenes in last night's Channel 4 documentary on Chinese orphanages. Can the Minister tell the House whether, during his meetings in Beijing, the Foreign Secretary obtained any assurance from the Chinese Government that the reports would be fully investigated and acted upon? Will the Minister make it clear that such treatment of children is unacceptable? Does he agree that, if China is to take its proper place in world affairs, it must improve its human rights record and give much higher priority to human rights?

Mr. Hanley: There were certainly very serious allegations of ill treatment of abandoned children in China in the "Human Rights Watch" report and the programme must have been profoundly disturbing to anyone who watched it, as I did, last night. My right hon. and learned

Friend the Foreign Secretary raised the issue forcibly with the Chinese yesterday and urged them to realise that, if they have changed the system as they claim, the best way to set people's minds at ease would be to ensure that the relevant authorities can investigate the charges. They should, therefore, open up the orphanages for public inspection, as they apparently did in Shanghai. There is still more to investigate before the rest of the world can feel that human rights abuses are coming to an end in China. It is an extremely important matter and the visit of my right hon. and learned Friend comes at the right time to express the feelings of many in this House.

Japan

21. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's relations with Japan. [6858]

Mr. Hanley: UK relations with Japan are excellent. We are developing close co-operation on international issues, investment, trade, science and technology and in many other areas.

Mr. Viggers: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that the relationship with Japan is now so close that the UK is Japan's natural link with mainland Europe and that Japan's economic strength and political maturity make it a suitable candidate for permanent membership of the Security Council? For the same reasons, would it not be appropriate for us to discuss military co-operation with Japan, with a view to co-operating in humanitarian efforts and peacekeeping in due course?

Mr. Hanley: The Government are keen to encourage good co-operation between the UK and Japan in a range of areas, including defence. It is in the interests of this country and the international community that key members of the Japanese defence forces should have the opportunity to learn from the United Kingdom's peacekeeping experience. We should encourage Japan to share the international burden of peacekeeping, both financially and with trained personnel, and I therefore agree with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Tony Banks: Would not relations with Japan improve immensely if, for example, the Japanese stopped slaughtering minke whales in the Antarctic—something that is against all international agreements?

Mr. Hanley: The United Kingdom believes that the decision of the Institute of Cetacean Research to sue Mr. Vetier was a private matter for the Japanese courts. We have certainly made clear to Japan on numerous occasions our objections to so-called scientific whaling. The hon. Gentleman may well know that I support his campaign to "Save the Whale". Indeed, someone once said that I was the only human being to receive a dividend from "Save the Whale".

BILL PRESENTED

NURSERY EDUCATION AND GRANT-MAINTAINED SCHOOLS

Mrs. Secretary Shephard, supported by the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Lilley, Mr. Secretary Dorrell, Mr. Secretary Hague, Mr. Robin Squire and Mrs. Cheryl Gillan, presented a Bill to provide for the making of grants in respect of nursery education and to permit borrowing by grant-maintained schools: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 41.]

Delegated Legislation

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

FIRE SERVICES

That the North Wales Fire Services (Combination Scheme) Order 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 3218) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

That the South Wales Fire Services (Combination Scheme) Order 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 3230) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

Question agreed to.

Regional Government

3.32 pm

Mr. Chris Davies (Littleborough and Saddleworth): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to establish elected Parliaments in each of the regions of England; to define the powers and authority of these bodies; and for related purposes.

The passage of this Bill will demonstrate that the House is determined to reverse the creeping centralisation of power that has turned Britain into the most centralised state in Europe—a country in which decision-taking authority is concentrated in the hands of a small group of Ministers and where no attempt is made to provide a balance to centralised power by harnessing the ideas, initiative and enthusiasm of people throughout the regions.

From the outset, I want to make it clear that the establishment of regional government as proposed in the Bill will not result in the creation of an additional layer of bureaucracy. Far from it; the objective of the Bill is to achieve a dramatic reduction in the powers and cost of central Government. The process of decision taking by the centre will be replaced by one of decision taking by the regions.

For example, the strong and effective tier of regional government proposed in the Bill will eliminate the need for the Department of the Environment in its present form. Its work will be almost entirely superseded. The powers allocated to regional government are such that the roles of the Departments of Transport, Trade and Industry, and Employment and Education will also be significantly diminished. While the establishment of regional parliaments will bring under democratic authority tiers of government that in practice already exist at regional level, major changes in the departmental structure of central Government will also be required.

The Bill will have three far-reaching effects. First, it will enshrine in our system of government the principle of subsidiarity, enabling decisions to be made at the lowest practical level and as close as possible to the people whom they affect. That is a principle much praised by Ministers when they speak of Britain's place in Europe, but it is a case of "Do as I say, not as I do" in our domestic affairs; for there the principle is honoured only by its absence. It is a nonsense and a disgrace that people in regions such as mine, the north-west—which has a population of 7 million and is larger than four nation states in the European Union—have so little influence on decisions that affect them and them alone.

Secondly, the Bill provides the seedcorn for the growth of regional centres of economic influence, a step of the utmost importance if all parts of the nation are to benefit fully from our membership of the European Union and the introduction of a single currency. For 150 years, the tendency of economic influence to gravitate towards the centre has been demonstrated by the decline of our provincial cities in relation to London and financial centres elsewhere. Decisions affecting the livelihoods of entire communities are too often made by people with no knowledge of or sympathy with those localities. The tendency towards centralisation of power is likely to be accelerated by the adoption of a single currency, and it is therefore important that we take steps now to strengthen the influence of our regions on economic decision making.

Thirdly, the Bill provides a crucial step in the long-overdue modernisation of our stagnating democracy and outdated institutions, whose failure is one reason why the country has been in relative decline for so long. If we look across Europe, we see nation states all of which have decentralised their decision making. There are 20 regional governments in Italy, 16 Länder in Germany, 17 autonomous communities in Spain and 22 regional governments in France, all created since the end of the last war. In their respective localities, they command great public support. Far from dividing their countries or threatening their unions, they provide bonds of democratic legitimacy and regional pride that draw their nations together.

The regional parliaments that the Bill will establish in England will have general authority to act in any field not specifically designated for central or local government. They will play a major role in the distribution of capital and revenue funding to local government and the powerful quangos that exist at present—development corporations, English Partnerships and the like. They will have strategic planning powers, authority to encourage economic development and responsibilities for training, further education, transport planning and infrastructure development.

Not all those areas of authority will be assumed immediately by regional parliaments. In Spain the regional communities are being encouraged to develop at their own pace, and the Bill provides for regional governments in this country to take powers from central Government at a time of their choosing. The Bill recognises that the development of the competence and authority of the new institutions will be a gradual process, and that people must be given time and freedom to work out what they consider to be the most appropriate hierarchy of democratic administration. The result is bound to vary from region to region.

Because the Bill provides for the establishment of a new constitutional settlement and a genuine sharing of authority between central and regional government, the regional parliaments will have recourse to the courts if central Government seek to usurp their authority to determine policy on matters in regard to which autonomy rightly rests with them. The Bill provides for the appointment of commissions to facilitate the creation of the new bodies, able to determine the boundary of each region and the locations of the regional seats of government. Uniformity of size is not an objective. Perhaps the new bodies will choose to follow the boundaries of the Government's existing eight administrative areas; perhaps not. They are certainly already large by European standards.

It is also important to proceed by consent. Diversity is perfectly acceptable if it encourages a strong identification between regional parliaments and the people whom they represent. For example, the regional government of Saarland in Germany deals with a population of just 1 million. Such special arrangements might be appropriate in areas like Cornwall. We could even set up a mini-state in Macclesfield if that would please the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton).

Charged as they are with emotions of local pride, those will not be easy tasks. But they have been undertaken in many countries before ours and I have no reason to suppose that our solutions will be any less successful. For the time being, I shall avoid speculating about the appropriate seat of regional government in the north-west.

The commissions are also charged with the task of making arrangements for the election of members of the regional parliaments. Hon. Members will not be surprised to hear that the specified method of election in this Bill is required to ensure that voting intentions are reflected on a broadly proportional basis. From the beginning, membership of the regional parliaments will accurately reflect the electorate, which this House has long failed to do.

Importantly, the Bill provides for the establishment of an interregional finance commission and formal consultative procedures between the regional parliaments, the Treasury and this House. Although the parliaments will have some tax-raising powers, a large element of their funding will be provided by the Exchequer, and the distribution of funds between regions must be equitable.

In constitutional terms, it would not be too extreme to describe the Bill's effect as revolutionary, as it will fundamentally alter the role of central Government. Although it may be regarded as radical in Britain, however, it would be considered as no more than pragmatic—even tame—by our European partners. That reflects the fact that our Government institutions are trapped in the past and stifle new ideas.

The European Union of which we are part is a Europe of the regions. It is time that we, too, looked to our regions and harnessed the initiatives of their people to find new solutions to the problems that we face. It is time that we brought our constitution and democracy up to date, and placed the principles of decentralisation and subsidiarity at the core of our system of government.

3.41 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I oppose the Bill because it is the most appalling piece of rubbish that has been put before the House for many years.

The hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Davies) has not been here for two minutes and he wants to saddle our constituents with yet another level of government and of taxation. I do not know about his area, but my constituents would be saddled with a parish council, a district council, a county council, a regional council, this Westminster Parliament, which is the fount of authority, and also with the European Parliament, the Commission and all the rest. The Liberal Democrats would land us with six levels of government, all with tax-raising powers.

The practical questions that should have been answered by the proposal were not even put forward. It is Liberal party policy to have a regional council for Cornwall, but we have not heard what county councillors—perhaps Liberal ones—from Cornwall say about that. Who would be responsible there? Where would the regional council be sited in my area? Perhaps it would be in Reading, tucked around the other side of London.

Does the hon. Gentleman have such a lack of faith in his Liberal colleagues on Kent county council that he proposes a regional council, which would take legal action against his Liberal colleagues on Kent county council? I would have a little sympathy for that idea, because their management of Kent county council is so incompetent that

[Mr. Jacques Arnold]

they should be taken to court. The solution to our ills is for people to elect decent councils, not be saddled with yet another level of government as the hon. Gentleman proposes.

The hon. Gentleman referred to an interregional finance commission, but did not make it clear what that would do, other than contain yet more politicians who would squander public money. I have never heard such absurd nonsense as this proposal to saddle my constituents with more taxation, more politicians and more restrictions. I hope that the House will chuck out this ridiculous Bill.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 29, Noes 61.

Division No. 20] **[3.45 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Godman, Dr Norman A
Gordon, Mildred
Harvey, Nick
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
Maddock, Diana
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Wareing, Robert N
Wigley, Dafydd

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Simon Hughes and
Mr. Nigel Jones.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Budgen, Nicholas
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Day, Stephen
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Gallie, Phil
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Jessel, Toby
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
Maitland, Lady Olga
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Riddick, Graham
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Whitney, Ray
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Sir Cranley Onslow and
Mr. Jacques Arnold.

Question accordingly negatived.

Orders of the Day

Security Service Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

3.55 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill is short but significant. Its purpose is to ensure that the forces of law and order have all the available tools and assistance at their disposal in seeking to combat the threat that is posed by organised crime. Its effect will be to enable the Security Service to bring all its skills and experience to bear in support of the law enforcement agencies when they take on criminal gangs, drug traffickers, money launderers, racketeers and others involved in organised crime.

I shall begin by explaining a little of the background to the Bill, and specifically the way in which it fits into the Government's broader strategy for fighting serious and organised crime.

Organised crime and those who perpetrate it are a menace to society. We are confronted with sophisticated criminals who are well organised, well resourced and well equipped, who have no compunction about using violence to achieve their ends, and who have no concern for those whose lives they ruin, especially by addiction to the drugs they peddle. The consequences of their activities are misery and human tragedy on a huge scale.

In due course, we shall examine, as we should, the civil rights implications of the provisions of the Bill. However, we would do well to remember that the greatest infringement of human rights in our society comes from the bullets, the knives and the drugs that are the stock in trade of the criminals against whom the Bill is aimed. A great deal is already being done by law enforcement agencies to tackle that type of crime, but there can be no room for complacency.

The Home Affairs Select Committee published its third report of the 1994-95 session, on organised crime, in July 1995. It acknowledged that organised crime was a cause for concern. Let me take the opportunity to pay tribute to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) and the Committee he chairs for producing a very helpful and constructive report. The Government published their reply to that report yesterday. We agree with a great deal of what is contained in it.

We especially agree with the fifth recommendation of the Select Committee, which states:

> "While we recognise that intelligence gathering has a vital role to play in the fight against organised crime we do not conclude that the present situation yet calls for substantial inroads to be made into ordinary citizens' freedom from intrusion by the State".

As I shall demonstrate to the House, the Bill does fully protect the freedoms of ordinary citizens. However, it is the first part of the recommendation that I think is especially pertinent—the recognition that intelligence gathering is vital in the fight against organised crime. The Bill seeks to make that activity more effective.

It is important that we recognise that the nature of serious crime is changing. Of course, individuals may carry out a hold-up or bank robbery in isolation. But today's serious criminal is equally likely to be a member of, or more loosely affiliated to, a group of others involved in a continuing series of criminal activities. The law enforcement agencies can no longer think in terms solely of solving individual crimes. If particular members of the group are caught and convicted, the group may well carry on with its criminal activities. These activities can continue over months, or even years, and membership of the gang may well be amorphous.

These are often people who, through ill-gotten gains, have purchased apparently respectable businesses and other cover for their activities. When faced with such criminals, who share many of the characteristics of terrorist groups, good intelligence operations are clearly vital. We wholeheartedly endorse this recommendation of the Select Committee.

That is why we think it necessary to take a number of steps to enhance the capability of our law enforcement agencies to gather and use intelligence when fighting organised crime. Many of these were announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in his speech at Blackpool on 13 October. The package of measures that we are putting in place includes strengthening the central contribution of the National Criminal Intelligence Service; developing the regional crime squads to provide a national police response to tackle organised crime; and engaging the Security Service to support the fight against serious crime.

Since its creation in 1992, the National Criminal Intelligence Service has made an impressive contribution to the fight against serious crime. It has proved to be the focal point for the gathering of intelligence on organised crime and a useful liaison point for overseas law enforcement agencies. But we agree with the Select Committee that the NCIS could be made more effective, and that its role can be developed.

In doing so, we need to define the status of the NCIS more clearly. At present, it is a part of the Home Office, although, clearly, its day-to-day management is a matter for the director-general rather than Ministers. We intend to give it a clearer and separate identity, with the freedom to manage its own affairs and to make further improvements to its effectiveness.

We also intend to create a national crime squad. We need to develop the existing regional crime squads to ensure that there is an effective national tier to the operational policing response. Again, it is important to recognise the changing nature of serious crime. Much more serious crime is now national and international. We must do more than just respond; we must get ahead of it.

The necessary building blocks are already in place. Regional crime squads have in recent years played an important and effective role in combating high-level criminality that crosses various local boundaries. But there are limitations. The regional crime squads are based on voluntary collaborative arrangements. Their national co-ordinator has no authority to direct the deployment of their resources. These arrangements are no longer adequate to meet the challenges we face. They must be revised, reinforced and brought up to date.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The right hon. and learned Gentleman has made it quite clear that the Government have still not resolved what the national crime squad is going to be—whether, for instance, it will

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

operate throughout the United Kingdom or just in England and Wales—what its relationship to the NCIS will be, and therefore what the relationship with the Security Service will be. Does he appreciate how difficult it is to work out how the Security Service will relate to the police, when it is not known what the national structure will be?

Mr. Howard: I do not accept that the right hon. Gentleman's conclusion follows from his earlier points. I was about to come to those very matters.

As the House will appreciate, the two measures which I have just discussed—putting the NCIS on a proper footing, and the creation of a national crime squad—have far-reaching implications. We are working through these implications with the Association of Chief Police Officers, whose views on all this I regard as of great importance, and other interested bodies, to ensure that the structures we create are those that will work effectively and which will command widespread support. Some of these changes are likely to need legislation. We hope to be in a position to introduce such legislation in the next Session.

There is, however, one element of our response that is discrete, which can be implemented in advance of the rest of the package; that is the basis of the Bill: to enable the Security Service to act in support of the law enforcement agencies against serious crime.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): Is not the Secretary of State putting the cart before the horse? There is a real fear that the relationship of the Security Service to the police will be uncertain. It is all very well to talk about developing structures, but, as Sir Paul Condon said in his Police Foundation lecture last year:

"I will argue that we have a foundation on which we can build. However, in some places the foundation is too weak to sustain additional pressure, and change is necessary."

Britain's senior policeman is saying that the structures and the foundation that exist may not be good enough to take the pressures that might result from the Bill.

Mr. Howard: I have just spelt out that we accept that change is necessary, and that we are currently in the process of working through that change's implications with the Association of Chief Police Officers and others, but that is no reason why we should wait longer than is necessary to avail ourselves of the contribution that the Security Service can make in the fight against serious organised crime. That is the implication of the questions of both the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and the hon. Gentleman. Should we wait another year before availing ourselves of the contribution of the Security Service, when there is no need to do so?

The Security Service was founded some 87 years ago. In 1909, it consisted of one person, Captain Vernon Kell, formerly of the South Staffordshire Regiment. Today, the service has some 2,000 staff. The service's history has been characterised by its ability to deploy its skills and techniques to respond to changing threats and to the changing demands on it.

As the brochure on the Security Service that I published in 1993 makes clear, in its early years the service concentrated on the threat posed by German spies. In the 1920s and 1930s, the concentration was on the perceived Bolshevik threat. In the years leading up to, and during, the second world war, attention was concentrated on the threat from fascism.

In the cold war years after the second world war, the Security Service once more turned its attention to the communist threat. In the 1970s and since, a great deal of its attention has been given to countering the threat posed by terrorism emanating from certain groups and countries in the middle east. More recently, as the House will know, the service has played a prominent role in countering Irish terrorism, and, since 1992, it has had the lead role in that regard on the mainland. Its history has therefore been one of flexible response to changing threats and changing priorities. Over the years, our country has been extremely well served by the service.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Is not the background to all this the fact that the Security Service is running out of threats, and that a new one is having to be invented to save large public spending cuts that might otherwise have to be introduced to these bloated organisations?

Mr. Howard: I do not share the hon. Gentleman's rather idyllic view of the world in which we live. There are, alas, still far too many threats, but if it proves to be the case that some spare resources are available in the Security Service, we should avail ourselves of its particular skills and expertise in the fight against organised crime, which is one of the greatest threats we face.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I for one would not underestimate MI5's traditional role in combating the curse of international terrorism, but if MI5 is to have extended powers under the Bill to deal with serious crime, is that not all the more reason to ensure that accountability exists?

Is the Home Secretary aware that the limited parliamentary accountability—which now consists of the Intelligence and Security Committee, which is not answerable directly to Parliament or to the Prime Minister, does not even meet in parliamentary buildings, and in the servicing of which the House of Commons Clerks are not involved—is inadequate? Therefore, if such extended powers are to be introduced, there should be proper accountability to Parliament.

Mr. Howard: I shall deal with accountability shortly, but hon. Members will not be astonished to hear that I do not share the hon. Gentleman's view, and that I do not accept that the arrangements for accountability are inadequate.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Given that the Bill refers to the United Kingdom and to the British islands, what role will be played in the scheme of things by the Scottish Office and by Scottish police forces? Has consultation taken place with the Scottish Office and with senior police officers throughout Scotland?

Mr. Howard: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that consultation is taking place with the authorities in Scotland. I have just been talking about our intention to create a national crime squad, but as the hon. Gentleman will know, there is already a Scottish crime squad. In some respects, the putting in place of the arrangements necessary to make the new role for the Security Service

as effective as we would like it to be will perhaps be somewhat easier in Scotland than in the rest of the kingdom.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): I am a little concerned about my right hon. and learned Friend's reference to flexible response. He correctly identified the Security Service as starting out in 1909, but is it not a fact that the role of the Security Service remained unchanged and limited to direct threats to the realm involving counter-espionage, counter-sabotage and counter-subversion, until November 1989? That was when the first substantial change took place, authorised by Parliament, in order to extend the powers to terrorism. Today we are dealing with perhaps an even greater extension of Security Service powers into the criminal justice system.

Mr. Howard: As my hon. Friend says, it is true that the first legislative change was incorporated in the Security Service Act 1989, but as I have sought to explain and identify, there were changes in earlier years. Those changes were considerable, and marked a different attitude on the part of the service to the various threats that it had to counter.

Although I do not disguise from my hon. Friend or the House the fact that the proposals included in the Bill mark a further change, I contend that they are part of a tradition of change and flexible response which has been a hallmark of the service. Although the Bill marks a new departure for the service and takes it into a new area of work, such changes in direction are by no means unprecedented.

Mr. David Ashby (North-West Leicestershire): Perhaps my right hon. and learned Friend can help me with something which has been worrying and puzzling me. He will know that, for a long time, I have advocated a national police force and fought against the proliferation of police forces. For example, I have maintained that we have Customs and Excise as a major police force as well as various local police forces. We now have a criminal intelligence section and a further proliferation with the transport police, the atomic police and the ports police.

There are so many police forces that we do not know where we are going or where we are coming from. We are now to have another police force, rather like the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which will be more related to Customs and Excise than anything else because it will be drug-related.

My right hon. and learned Friend talked about organised crime, upon which, as he will know, the Select Committee has been reporting. He will know also that at the moment there is a great threat from eastern Europe. How will all that come together? Is it not time we started to talk about a national police force with a national role, with various subsidiaries, of which the Security Service would be one?

Mr. Howard: I am sorry to say that I do not accept my hon. Friend's analysis. The Bill does not propose another police force. The Security Service will not become a police force. Of course, we need a national component in our policing service, and we have that component. However, I do not believe that it would be sensible to remove the local accountability of the police service in this country, which is, in many ways, one of its great strengths. I do not accept what my hon. Friend said about the British Transport police and other separate police forces. They have particular and specific roles, and I believe that it makes sense to have arrangements for them.

I believe that the time has come to bring the skills and experience of the Security Service to bear in the war against those who, if they do not themselves necessarily pose a threat to national security, have the capability to do serious damage to the fabric of society and to destroy people's lives.

I come now to the detailed provisions of the Bill. Clause 1 adds to the functions of the Security Service. As the law currently stands, in the form of the Security Service Act 1989, the remit of the Security Service is confined to combating threats to national security and threats from abroad to the economic well-being of the United Kingdom. The Bill will add a third function, which is to act in support of the prevention and detection of serious crime.

Those words mirror the words in the Intelligence Services Act 1994, which gives a role in fighting serious crime to both the Secret Intelligence Service—SIS—and Government communications headquarters—GCHQ—and emphasise the fact that the role of the service will be a supporting one. The law enforcement agencies will retain the primary duty for tackling crime, and will be responsible for tasking the Security Service in its serious crime work.

Mr. Beith: I am glad that the Home Secretary has made that point, but the Bill does not say that. It makes no provision to ensure that work is undertaken in that area only if the police task the Security Service to do so. Why has not the right hon. and learned Gentleman seen fit to include that in the Bill?

Mr. Howard: I do not accept the right hon. Gentleman's interpretation of the Bill. As I pointed out, the Bill contains the words "in support". I contend that the meaning that I have spelt out relating to the way in which we envisage the Security Service working is, in fact, the meaning of the words contained in the Bill. If the right hon. Gentleman takes a different view, that can be explored in Committee. If he wants to propose different language, that can be explored in Committee.

However, I urge upon the right hon. Gentleman—and this is an extremely important point—that it would be thoroughly undesirable to insert language in the Bill that would prove an invitation to legal challenge, and would end in guilty men walking free from the courts through legal technicalities. That is something to be avoided. We believe that the language in the Bill gives the meaning we want, while minimising the dangers that I have identified.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): I accept what the right hon. and learned Gentleman said about not so constraining the wording of the Bill that that wording then negates its original purpose. I want to press him on the use of the phrase "serious crime". Up to now, he has rightly justified the extension of the powers of the Security Service by reference to the dangers of organised crime. However, the Bill refers to "serious crime". Will he explain why the draftsman chose to use the phrase "serious crime", but the right hon. and learned Gentleman, in his justification, has referred to "organised crime"?

Mr. Howard: The reason is much the same as the one I gave in response to the right hon. Member for

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Berwick-upon-Tweed. The view has been taken that that wording is likely to minimise the prospect of legal challenge, which would lead to the unfortunate consequences that I have identified. If the hon. Gentleman or his hon. Friends have alternative versions, they can be considered in Committee.

Dr. Godman: I am a little concerned about the provision in clause 2—

Mr. Howard: I have not finished clause 1 yet.

Dr. Godman: I will wait.

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his patience.

The principle of the Security Service working only in support of the law enforcement agencies in serious crime matters is endorsed by all the parties involved. It is reinforced by the second half of clause 1, which imposes an additional duty on the Director-General of the Security Service. The Bill imposes a duty on the director-general to ensure that there are arrangements in place for co-ordinating the Security Service's work against serious crime with the activities of police forces and other law enforcement agencies.

The co-ordination arrangements will be governed by the agreed principles to which I have already referred—police primacy and tasking. This is an especially important facet of the measure, and it was of considerable concern and interest to the Intelligence and Security Committee, whose report on Security Service work against organised crime was published just before Christmas. Perhaps I could take this opportunity to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) and his Committee for their constructive report, which recognised that the Security Service could bring a distinctive package of skills to the fight against organised crime.

Clearly, if the Security Service is to be effective in its work in support of the law enforcement agencies, it is vital that this work is effectively co-ordinated with the work of those agencies. There is no question of the Security Service being self-tasking or working on its own in isolation without the knowledge of the law enforcement agencies. The Security Service will work closely with those agencies, and, as the Intelligence and Security Committee recommended, will be tasked by them.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): We are now into the detail of the Bill. I, like many of my hon. Friends, have been waiting patiently to intervene since the Home Secretary said in the first part of his speech that he was going to come to an important and major section on accountability. Will he assure us that he will return to it? When he turned to the Bill's details, I became worried that he had skipped that part.

Mr. Howard: I give the hon. Gentleman the assurance he seeks.

The way in which the co-ordination will usually operate is that the Security Service will be tasked in particular areas or operations by the National Criminal Intelligence Service, which will in turn liaise closely with local police forces and regional crime squads. It may be that the Security Service will be invited to look at a particular type of crime, group or area that is suffering from organised crime. In any event, it would clearly be sensible for its resources to be deployed where they can have the greatest effect.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): On accountability, and bearing in mind the problems when the customs have worked with police forces and regional crime squads in the past, would not part of the solution to the problem be for officers from the security services who were seconded to a particular case or investigation to carry the powers of a constable? In that case, they would have the power to arrest, to bear arms and all the other powers that a constable has—as well as being accountable.

Mr. Howard: That would clearly be one answer, but I do not think that it would be the best answer, because the Security Service is not a police force, and those who work for it are not police officers. Its accountability arrangements—I come to the point that I assured the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) that I would indeed come to—are different from those of the police. Apart from the fact, to which I have already referred, that the Security Service will not operate independently but only in support of and at the request of law enforcement agencies, there are additionally, as the House will know, already a considerable number of safeguards in place to ensure that the Security Service does not abuse its powers.

The Director-General of the Security Service is personally accountable to me for all the service's activities. There is in place a Security Service commissioner, supported by a tribunal, to carry out independent oversight of the service's activities and to provide an avenue of complaint, and if required, redress for those who feel that they have been subjected to unfair treatment by the service. All Security Service warrants, about which I shall say more in a moment, will continue to require the signature of a Secretary of State, and will continue to be subject to scrutiny by the commissioner.

I should again stress that the Security Service is not to be given any new powers. It has not been given the power of arrest or any of the other rights that are traditionally enjoyed by the police. It is merely being given the ability to use its existing powers in a new field.

Mr. Allason: How many complaints have been considered by the Security Service tribunal?

Mr. Howard: I do not think that I can give my hon. Friend that figure off the top of my head, but I have no doubt that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State will deal with it in his winding-up speech.

Mr. Allason: Is it not a fact that that figure—even a ballpark figure could be 25, 50, 100 or 1,000—is secret? Is not one of the problems about accountability the fact that, although there may well be a structure in place, we are not allowed to know—since November 1989 precisely—how many investigations, if any, have been conducted? All that is known is that no complaint has been upheld.

Mr. Howard: As I indicated, my right hon. Friend will deal very fully with that point.

Mr. Rogers: I seem to recollect from the passage of the Intelligence Services Act 1994 that that figure was given and is in the public realm. I recollect that something

like 52 complaints had been put forward, and that the vast majority of them were considered to be relatively frivolous. Some had been investigated, even though they were not upheld. I think that the figure was around 50 between 1989 and the consideration of the Intelligence Services Act.

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I am afraid that I cannot confirm or fail to confirm his recollection on that point.

The Security Service Act 1989 originally gave the Security Service the power to apply for warrants, to be signed by a Secretary of State, authorising entry on or interference with property. Those so-called "property warrants" applied, naturally enough, only to the two functions of the Security Service that were laid down in that Act.

The Intelligence Services Act 1994 extended the power to apply for property warrants to both the SIS and GCHQ and, with one caveat, allowed them to do so for each of their three main functions: national security, economic well-being and serious crime. The caveat was that a serious crime property warrant could not apply to a property in the United Kingdom.

Clause 2 extends the right to apply for property warrants in serious crime cases to the Security Service. It will allow the service to apply for such property warrants in serious crime cases in relation to property in the United Kingdom, although it leaves in place the restriction against the SIS and GCHQ doing so.

If the Security Service is to become an active participant in the fight against organised crime in Britain, it makes sense for it to be given the ability to deploy the full range of tools that it uses in its other work. The service has very particular skills and expertise, and, on occasion, it will need property warrants in order to carry out its functions effectively. It therefore seems sensible to allow it to have the right to apply for serious crime property warrants in relation to property in the United Kingdom. As I said earlier, all such warrants require the approval of a Secretary of State, and are subject to scrutiny by the commissioner.

The work of the SIS and GCHQ, although it involves action against serious crime, is far more internationally focused. The SIS in particular has a remit which requires it to concentrate on the actions and intentions of persons abroad. The Bill makes no change to the role or responsibilities of either agency. We therefore do not consider it appropriate for the Bill to remove the restriction on SIS and GCHQ property warrants applying to property in the United Kingdom.

I greatly value, of course, the contribution that both the SIS and GCHQ make to the fight against serious crime. The fact that they are tasked by and enjoy close links with the law enforcement agencies provides a useful example and model of co-operation between law enforcement agencies and intelligence services.

Dr. Godman: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman. I am sorry for my over-eagerness earlier.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman has twice said that the granting of a warrant will be up to a Secretary of State. Will he confirm, then, that, in the investigation of a serious crime in Scotland, a member of the Security Service would seek such a warrant from the Secretary of State for Scotland?

Mr. Howard: I think that that would be the normal course of events, but the wording of the legislation is such that it is possible for more than one Secretary of State to grant and authorise that activity, and to sign such a warrant. The hon. Gentleman will understand the convenience of that, because frequently such warrants must be signed urgently, and the relevant Secretary of State may not be in the country at the time. Those arrangements are therefore as flexible as I am sure the hon. Gentleman would like them to be.

Property warrants are clearly a potentially important element in the armoury of the Security Service in its work in support of the prevention and detection of serious crime. The service, however, does not underestimate just how intrusive a power that can be, and nor do I. Accordingly, the Bill limits the circumstances in which a property warrant may be applied for by the Security Service in serious crime cases.

The Security Service can obtain a property warrant only if it relates to conduct which falls within the definition of serious crime which is within the Bill. Conduct which falls within the definition is criminal activity which

"involves the use of violence, results in substantial financial gain";

or involves a large number of people in pursuit of a common purpose; or is the kind of conduct for which someone with no previous convictions could reasonably expect to receive a prison sentence of three years or longer. Members of the House may well recognise that definition, as it is precisely the one used to govern the issue of warrants in serious crime cases under the Interception of Communications Act 1985. The definition has worked successfully in connection with that Act, and we see no reason to depart from it for the current purpose.

Before I leave the subject of warrants, I should make one other point. There is no specific statutory authority for the present arrangements whereby chief officers of police may themselves authorise the use of intrusive surveillance equipment in tackling serious crime. There are guidelines that control police activity of that sort very closely, and there is no evidence that they are being abused.

However, I accept that, as the Home Affairs Select Committee has recommended, a statutory system would be preferable. That is another matter that we are currently working through with the Association of Chief Police Officers. But I do not see it as providing any cause for withholding from the Security Service the necessary powers that clearly are already, and will continue to be, governed by statute and set in the context of their own accountability arrangements.

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): If the Security Service is granted a warrant, will the local police authority and local police officers on the ground be informed?

Mr. Howard: I do not know that it would necessarily be appropriate for the police to be informed of every operational detail of the work that the Security Service was carrying out. Of course, in all but the most exceptional circumstances, the local police would know in general terms of the work being carried out, because it would be taking place in support of their own activities,

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but it does not necessarily follow that they would need to know all the operational details in every respect. I do not think that they would regard such knowledge as relevant in every case.

Clause 3 makes it clear that the Bill extends to Northern Ireland, as it does to Scotland. The Security Service is a United Kingdom-wide organisation, and serious crime is a United Kingdom-wide problem. It therefore makes sense to ensure that the Security Service will be able to operate in its serious crime role throughout the United Kingdom. It will operate in support of the law enforcement agencies in Scotland and Northern Ireland in the same way as it will in England and Wales.

Customs and Excise, too, is a United Kingdom-wide service, and the Security Service's work in support of it will be on the same basis throughout the United Kingdom. With regard to the police, in England and Wales the Security Service will be tasked by the National Criminal Intelligence Service, and similar practical arrangements will be put in place in Scotland and Northern Ireland, where the lead is currently with the Scottish crime squad and the Royal Ulster Constabulary respectively.

Over the years, the Security Service has built up very particular skills and expertise. It has a long record of successes in long-term intelligence gathering and the infiltration of hostile organisations. Those are precisely the kinds of skills increasingly required to deal with the menace of organised crime.

That is not to say that the police do not possess such skills—indeed, I pay tribute to the many successes that the police and the Customs and Excise have had in dealing with organised crime—but we need to respond to the threat of organised crime with the full range of resources and techniques at our disposal, which must include the resources and skills of the Security Service.

Initially, the number of officers that the service will be able to deploy in pursuit of the new function will be small. The resources that it will be able to devote to that area of its work in future will depend on external circumstances and on the competing demands on its resources. In particular, much will depend on the continuance of the ceasefires in Northern Ireland. The costs will be borne from within the Security Service's existing provision.

The menace of organised crime is large and growing. We must fight it with every means at our disposal. The participation of the Security Service in that war will reinforce our ability to fight it effectively, and I commend the Bill to the House.

4.33 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): No one who has read the Home Affairs Committee's excellent report on organised crime should be in any doubt about the extent of the threat that such crime poses to this country and its citizens. The Select Committee was right to conclude that, taken as a whole, the extent of organised crime is a cause for serious concern.

Organised crime has not reached in the United Kingdom the proportions that it has reached in some other countries, and it is my fervent hope and belief that it never will. None the less, it is a cancer that, left unchecked, destroys the very fabric of decent society and makes inoperable the rights and duties that are fundamental to any functioning democracy.

Some countries have been run by or for the benefit of organised crime. Panama under General Noriega was one notorious example, while Colombia has been another. The military regime in Nigeria is characterised not only by its brutal disregard for human rights, but by the associated complicity of the regime in serious and well-organised international criminal networks. The collapse of the Soviet Union and other communist bloc states has been the occasion for the development of highly organised criminal conspiracies in those countries, involving the trafficking of drugs and other contraband, illegal immigration and money laundering. Even within the EU, there are some member states where the tentacles of organised crime reach well into government, as they have in Italy and the south of France.

None of this organised crime—either outside the United Kingdom or within it—yet poses a threat to the security of the United Kingdom itself, but the Select Committee was right to say in its unanimous report that

"the government and the police will need to take effective pre-emptive measures if an irretrievable expansion of organised crime in this country is to be avoided."

The question before the House in the form of the Bill is: what kind of pre-emptive measures will be appropriate and effective to meet the current and potential threat of organised crime?

Because of the power that they can wield over individual citizens, there is an absolute necessity in a democracy to ensure that all law enforcement agencies—the police, customs and the security services—are properly accountable for what they do within a clear statutory framework. As it happens, the accountability of the police was one of the first serious issues that I sought to tackle when I entered the House almost 17 years ago.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Too long.

Mr. Straw: It has indeed been too long—certainly too long on the Opposition Benches.

I introduced two ten-minute Bills aimed at strengthening the powers of police authorities by providing an independent element for the investigation of complaints against the police and for the establishment of a national police agency. These matters are relevant to the Bill, and have consequences to which I shall return later in my speech.

Of all the law enforcement agencies, the ones that understandably arouse the greatest potential anxiety are those that operate, albeit for very good reasons, most secretly—the intelligence agencies. Until recent years, the agencies worked under what I believed to be thoroughly unsatisfactory arrangements. There was no statutory framework for their operations and there was no accountability of any kind to Members of this House. During the past 11 years, there has been a marked change for the better. The Interception of Communications Act 1985, the Security Service Act 1989 and the Intelligence Services Act 1994 mean that there is now a statutory framework for the interception of communications, for the control and operation of the agencies themselves and for some accountability to this House through the Intelligence and Security Committee.

The arrangements might not be perfect—indeed, they might need to be strengthened in the light of experience—but they are a significant improvement on what went on before. I believe that that improvement has been welcomed by a great many of the dedicated staff of the agencies.

Mr. Mullin: On the question of strengthening the accountability procedures, does my hon. Friend recall that when the previous Intelligence Services Bill was going through the House, Labour Front-Bench Members stated that the Committee that was being set up should be made accountable to Parliament, and not to the Prime Minister? Is that still the position of Labour Front-Bench Members?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, both for asking that question and for letting me know that he was going to ask it. Of course we want the intelligence agencies to be properly accountable to this House. The question is how best that can be achieved while maintaining the operational integrity of the agencies. The arrangements have been in place following the 1994 Act, and it will be important to keep them under review. If they need to be strengthened, measures will be brought before the House to ensure that that is done.

Mr. Howard: So the answer is no.

Mr. Straw: No, the answer is maybe.

Mr. Rogers: As the person who was responsible for tabling those amendments during proceedings on the Bill that became the 1994 Act, I am rather surprised that my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) should raise that matter. He knows that the 150 amendments that we tabled did not represent the position of the Labour party but were probing amendments.

Mr. Straw: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for that explanation. When the Bill was going through the House, my responsibilities related to the Department of the Environment, not to any of the agencies that we are discussing today. We all look forward to my hon. Friend's speech later in the debate.

I paid a brief tribute a few moments ago to the work of the staff of the Security Service. In doing so, I place on record my appreciation of the approach of the retiring Director-General of the Security Service, Mrs. Stella Rimington. She has led the way in ensuring greater visibility, and far more public understanding of the purpose of the Security Service and its broad methods of work, without compromising the necessary operational secrecy of that agency.

The proposal in the Bill to extend the work of the Security Service to work in support of the police in serious crime represents a clear departure from its existing functional limits. It is a change that should not be made lightly. It is one about which I thought long and hard before recommending to my right hon. and hon. Friends that we should support the principle of the Bill. It is my view that there is a job to be done, that the Security Service has the skills and expertise necessary to deal with the job and that it should do the job, provided that Parliament is satisfied that it will take on the function and supplement the work of existing law enforcement agencies with adequate safeguards as regards its accountability.

Although we support the principle of the Bill, serious questions need to be answered today and during later stages of the Bill as to whether operational and accountability arrangements are satisfactory. Those questions relate to the definition of serious crime, to the relationship between the Security Service, the police and the other law enforcement agencies and to the consequences for the criminal justice system of involving Security Service employees in criminal justice investigations—in terms of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, the giving of evidence and the handling of complaints.

Wider issues have to be examined, including the need for a single statutory regime for surveillance, about which the Secretary of State spoke a moment ago, and the future of national policing functions. I shall deal with those issues in turn.

In practice, the work of the Security Service in fighting organised crime is likely to be confined to assisting in the investigation of very serious organised crime. In its evidence to the Select Committee, the Home Office included an informative working definition of organised crime, which is used by the National Criminal Intelligence Service, but which runs to more than 500 words. It could not be incorporated into the Bill. The Select Committee advised in its opening recommendation that we should not hinder the work of law enforcement with over-precise definitions of organised crime.

None the less, while I take account of what the Secretary of State said in answer to my intervention, the current drafting of clause 1, which uses the term "serious crime" without qualification, may be too loose. I hope that that matter will be examined in Committee. The use of that term without qualification contrasts with the qualifications imposed on its use in clause 2 in relation to intercepts. The Secretary of State mentioned a few moments ago that the term "serious crime" in relation to intercepts means an offence which involves the use of violence that results in substantial financial gain or, for example, for which it would normally be expected that a first offender would receive a sentence of three years or more.

Since I cannot conceive of any circumstance in which the Security Service would be helping to investigate crimes unless there were a reasonable prospect of the perpetrator serving a sentence of three years or more, I should like to hear from the Minister why the term "serious crime" in clause 1 should not be similarly qualified.

It may be argued—the Secretary of State touched on this—that that precise form of wording was used in the Intelligence Services Act 1994 in respect of the Secret Intelligence Service and Government communications headquarters, Cheltenham. We are all well aware that parliamentary draftsmen become affectionately attached to words that they have got through the House once. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) will remind us, one of the issues that he raised so eloquently during the Report stage of the 1994 Act was the definition of serious crime and whether it might have been better to have used a more qualified term.

It is accepted across the House that the role of the Security Service will be supplementary to that of the police and other law enforcement agencies. In his speech on the Loyal Address, the Secretary of State emphasised

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that the expertise of the Security Service would be there to "help" the police. In a letter that the Minister of State wrote to the Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee yesterday, he spoke of the Security Service supporting the police and other law enforcement agencies in tackling serious and organised crime.

Although the word "support" is used in the Bill, it is used in the context of support in respect of the

"prevention or detection of serious crime".

The words, support of the work of the police, or words to that effect, are not used.

There is understandable anxiety, not least among some police officers, that the Security Service might start to take the lead in some investigations. As far as I can divine from the fairly Delphic wording of the report of the Intelligence and Security Committee, that was its anxiety, too. It spoke of the contrast between the SIS and GCHQ, whose tasks are generally set separately by Ministers, and the Security Service, which it said was essentially

"self-tasking in relation to its existing statutory functions."

The Committee concluded, in paragraph 8:

"In so far as the Service is to be given a new role in countering 'conventional' criminal activity, the legislation needs to make very clear that it will be working in support of the law enforcement organisations."

That conclusion is entirely right. The words,

"in support of the law enforcement organisations"

are the problem. They do not appear on the face of the Bill. When the Minister replies, I should be grateful if he would deal with that matter and answer the anxieties that I am raising and the serious anxieties raised in the unanimous report of the Intelligence and Security Committee.

Mr. Sheerman: I was astounded that the Home Secretary did not give us any assurance of greater accountability, given this fundamental change in the law. If there is not to be any substantial increase in accountability, is not the fear that the tail of the security services will start to wag the dog of the criminal justice system justified?

Mr. Straw: That is an anxiety. I listened carefully to the Secretary of State, who made it clear that the Bill's purpose was that the Security Service should assist law enforcement agencies—that it should not be self-tasking. Given the anxieties that have been raised and the natural anxieties that are bound to exist, and which are shared on both sides of the House, about the work of organisations such as the Security Service, which necessarily have to work in secrecy, it is better for such a qualification to be placed on the face of the Bill, particularly as the Intelligence and Security Committee has recommended that course.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): I am inclined to agree with that point, but does not the Bill open up the Security Service Act 1989? We can now examine the nature of the remits, which was raised by the hon. Gentleman. National security as a term or reference point has caused considerable anxiety to many of us, as it has throughout the western world. Are we to understand that Labour is likely to re-examine those definitions and tasks in Committee?

Mr. Straw: Yes. As I have said, we support the principle of the Bill, but have reservations about its wording and the precise arrangements for accountability in its operation. We shall certainly seek to raise those reservations in Standing Committee and on Report, if appropriate.

Mr. Shepherd: Why can that not be done here in the Chamber?

Mr. Straw: I am doing it here now.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. We cannot have a sub-debate involving seated interventions.

Mr. Straw: The matter raised by the hon. Gentleman will have to be taken up with the usual channels, but I understand that there has been no argument about the intention to deal with the Bill in Standing Committee.

The change in the legislation will have an important impact on the criminal justice system. Because of the importance of its work to national security, Parliament, the public and the judicial system have accepted that the Security Service should be far less publicly accountable for its operations than the police or other law enforcement agencies. That has meant, for example, that officers in the Security Service have routinely given their evidence in court in camera, or without their true identities being disclosed.

As the Director-General of the Security Service said in her Dimbleby lecture,

"MI5 has no executive powers",

so any operations leading to the arrest of suspects, even within its existing functions, must be carried out by the police. None the less, national security—although extremely important—is a relatively narrow field. It must be accepted that in ordinary criminal trials, however serious, in which issues of national security are not involved, witnesses from the Security Service should not expect routinely to be treated differently from those from the police or customs. That would not exclude evidence being given in camera, or without the disclosure of true identity, when there were good reasons. Indeed, in certain circumstances, the police and customs already give evidence in that way. I believe, however, that the ground rules should be the same.

The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and its codes lay down clear rules relating to the gathering of evidence by the police, but we need reassurance from the Minister on whether and how the requirements of PACE will work in respect of Security Service staff involved in joint operations in the investigation of serious crime.

The handling of complaints that arise from a joint police-Security Service investigation greatly concerns police officers to whom I have spoken. As complaints against a member of the Security Service are covered not by the Police Complaints Authority, but by quite separate arrangements, some police officers have expressed to me a fear that, if things go wrong, the police might be left to carry the can.

I accept that, when two separate agencies are working on a single investigation, there can be no tailor-made answer to the problem, just as there is no tailor-made answer to the problem of complaints involving a joint operation by police and customs. I believe, however, that

the matter should be considered further in Committee, that guidance should be published and that Ministers should consider explicit co-operation and access for the Police Complaints Authority to the Security Service commissioner in the event of complaints against both police and Security Service officers arising from a joint operation.

I shall now deal with two wider issues relating to the Bill and the overall policy framework behind it. First, there is the need—raised by the Home Secretary—for a single regime for interception, bugging and property intrusion. As the Home Secretary observed, at present, interception of communications generally is strictly controlled by statute, as is intrusion into property by the Security Service.

As the Home Affairs Committee said, there are significant gaps in those overall arrangements. Police intrusion into property is controlled non-statutorily and senior police officers have made it clear to me, as they did to the Select Committee, that they are anxious that their use of such powers is not properly based in law. In some cases, the police's operations in those areas make them vulnerable to civil actions for trespass at the very least. In addition, with the advance of technology since 1985, some surveillance techniques, including bugging, have become much more widely available, and they, too, are outside the current statutory framework.

I therefore welcome both the Home Affairs Committee's recommendations and the Secretary of State's confirmation that proposals to place the whole of that area on a single statutory footing will be brought before the House at an early opportunity.

The last issue that I wish to raise concerns the future of national policing arrangements. The Labour party strongly believes in locally based, locally accountable police services. Such a system has served the country well and is infinitely better than drifting into a national police force. It is also much better than ending up with competing overlapping law enforcement jurisdictions, as has happened in the United States.

We want the arrangements for locally based, locally accountable police services to be strengthened, not least through the establishment of proper democratic arrangements for local accountability of the Metropolitan police to the people of London in respect of that service's local police functions.

Some police functions, however, must be carried out nationally. The fact that that has always been so is one explanation for the distinctive arrangement of having the Home Secretary as the authority for the Metropolitan police. Over the past few years, that national arrangement has been formalised through the establishment of the National Criminal Intelligence Service.

Like the Secretary of State, I pay tribute to the work achieved at the NCIS, but it is accepted across the House that it is in transition and needs greater clarity about its future structure and organisation. It is absurd that the NCIS is allowed to be involved in static surveillance but prohibited from following its target when it moves. The internal running of the organisation is complicated by the fact that all its staff are on secondment. The discipline of those police officers is, therefore, the ultimate responsibility not of the director of NCIS but of the police officers' parent chief constables. In the long term, that is not satisfactory.

The Home Affairs Committee also recognised that separate regional crime squads with no central executive direction should be replaced by a more nationally co-ordinated structure. During his speech at the Conservative party conference, the Prime Minister wrote up in lights the idea of establishing a national squad. Yesterday, however, the Minister of State gave a much more qualified response to the Select Committee's report on that proposal. He said that the creation of a national crime squad was not straightforward. I wonder whether he cleared his remark with Downing street, because it was not what the Prime Minister led us to believe. I see much advantage in having a national squad, but we accept that it would not be straightforward.

Mr. Beith: A Scottish Office spokesman made an even more qualified comment shortly before Christmas when asked whether the national squad would apply to Scotland. He told *The Herald* that his

"department was looking into the idea and consulting with interested parties, but that judgment on the feasibility of the idea would be reserved until the consultation is complete".

The Prime Minister has suggested that a national squad is about to be created.

Mr. Straw: The Prime Minister, on this issue as on many others, was slightly ahead of himself when he made that speech.

I should be glad if the Minister would tell us, when he replies, whether we will have one national police operation or two. I inferred from what the Secretary of State said that there will be both a strengthened NCIS and a separate national crime squad to absorb the work of the regional crime squads.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): I have here an extract from the Prime Minister's speech on 13 October 1995 in Blackpool. He said:

"So for the first time ever, we're discussing with the police the establishment of a national squad. This will have one mission: to take on organised crime in this country and break it".

The hon. Gentleman cannot say that the Prime Minister was ahead of himself.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman is making heavy weather of my point. For the avoidance of doubt, I, too, have brought along a copy of the Prime Minister's speech.

I have raised the question of whether the proposals will result in one national body or two. There is a strong case for establishing a single national police agency within a framework which would incorporate the work of the NCIS, the work of the regional crime squads and the remaining functions of the Metropolitan police that are primarily national in character.

Most of the crime that so blights people's daily lives is local in character. It involves yobbish behaviour, disorder, vandalism, street violence and burglary. Much of it appears to be highly disorganised and opportunistic, but behind much of the local and apparently disorganised crime lies the scourge of illegal drugs. Their supply is now part of a highly organised, international, multi-billion dollar industry. Totally ruthless individuals are ready to wreck the lives of thousands of young people and to destabilise communities in the pursuit of greed. In some countries, those ruthless individuals are ready to undermine the very foundation of decent society.

[Mr. Straw]

We welcome the use of any additional resources to help the police in their vital fight against organised crime. We have, as I have explained, some reservations about the arrangements for the operation and accountability of the Security Service in its new role. However, we welcome the principle and the purpose of the Bill.

5.2 pm

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): The hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), with whom I had an earlier practice round on this matter elsewhere, described the issue of organised crime as a threat that had to be invented. I much preferred the language and the commitment of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who left no doubt of his and his right hon. and hon. Friends' recognition of the seriousness of the threat that faces this country from serious organised crime. That threat does not need to be invented. If anybody tried to dismiss it as lightly as that, he would be doing no service to the people of this country.

I know that the members of the all-party Intelligence and Security Committee agree with me about the seriousness of the threat. We have already studied the matter and, as the House knows, for convenience in advance of the debate and the Bill, we produced a report on Security Service work against serious organised crime. We believe that the seriousness of this problem is not to be underestimated.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, when he introduced the debate, described serious organised crime as a menace to society. Certainly, we have to consider the implications of many aspects—I shall talk later about the threat from the drug trade—of organised crime: the fact that it is affecting society from so many different angles; the pervasiveness of the threat; and the capacity and organisation of serious organised crime. There can be no question but that we must ensure that we bring to bear all the resources available to a democracy to try to protect society from that threat.

The establishment of the drug trade must be, arguably, the most impressive feat of organisation in recent times. If it is a free market enterprise, urged on by the enormous profit potential that exists, one has to have some respect for the capacity of manufacture, export, import and distribution that has made those products available on such a scale in every constituency in this country and in every corner of the world. That has been achieved by massive, international organisation, backed up by intimidation, violence and ruthlessness on a scale that is a major threat to our society.

The present law enforcement agencies have had, by any standards, substantial successes. I understand that the street value of the drugs that were seized in the past year is some £500 million. However, even against that achievement, drug prices in real terms have fallen, which means that the product is readily available. Tragically, we know that to be the case. The importance of the challenge of dealing with the drugs trade cannot be underestimated against the background of the recent great personal tragedies that have occurred because of the continuing availability of illegal drugs.

Mr. Mullin: I do not want to spoil a good story, but some of the massive organisation behind the international drugs trade came from some of the regimes that the United States intelligence agency set up in south-east Asia and central America. That went on for so long because the Central Intelligence Agency was not accountable.

Mr. King: I shall not pursue that line because this is a serious problem. If we are distracted, we will do no service to the people of this country. I know the threat that is faced by my constituents and by the hon. Member's constituents and their children. Chasing after old issues will do no service to them.

The other crimes that are a threat develop from the drug trade, such as money laundering. We face risks from massive financial frauds and extortion, which are major threats to the economies of the world, not least to our own and to the City of London. Those are major international issues. I had never heard of advanced fee fraud until the arrests that took place in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason), as has been mentioned. When those arrests were made, we began to hear some evidence about the scale of the international conspiracy that was involved. That was manifest robbery, being conducted on a massive international scale. Other problems include letter of credit fraud, benefit fraud and immigration fraud. Those are not small-time activities, but are becoming international conspiracies that are a major threat to our country.

I noticed, in connection with my right hon. and learned Friend's visit to India, that the master forgers—he described Madras as possibly the world capital for forgery—are now believed to have cracked every security feature of the British visa. Coupled with financial fraud and rackets on that scale is the extortion and intimidation of those who are involved.

Madras may be the world capital for forgers, but there is some concern that eastern Europe may be the world capital for counterfeiting. The threat to the currencies of the world from counterfeiting—another international fraud that could threaten the currency of our own country—must also be of great concern to us.

We know that there are problems with drugs, other forms of fraud and major criminal activity, accompanied by intimidation, as I said, by extortion and by murders. We have seen that happening on our streets and the threat to our police forces. We know of the fear that now exists in our major cities. We never hoped to see such fear although we knew that it existed in, for example, the United States. We have seen the growth of ethnic gangs, with the Afro-Caribbean influence in the importation of crack and the west African association with benefit fraud and the drug trade.

The product of criminal activity in the world, especially in the drugs trade, is now estimated to amount to $500 billion a year. The impact of that on the whole international financial framework simply cannot be dismissed as a new and rather interesting sideline. I believe that it is a major threat to the national fabric and, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary said, a menace to our society. Against that background, we are discussing whether the Bill should receive a Second Reading today and whether the Security Service should be brought into the fight against serious organised crime.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: My right hon. Friend gives voice to major concerns felt by all of us in the House.

However, he may be aware that the Security Service Act 1989 sets out the remit of the Security Service; that is part of the problem. The Act says:

"The function of the Service shall be the protection of national security and, in particular, its protection against threats of espionage, terrorism and sabotage . . . It shall also be the function of the Service to safeguard the economic well-being of the United Kingdom against threats posed by the actions or intentions of persons outside the British Islands."

The remit is already widely drawn. Why is it necessary to extend it? The main points are covered in the 1989 Act.

Mr. King: That is precisely the point that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary made. As he realises, there is much that is not covered. My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) referred to the threat to national economic well-being. I am discussing some of the things that cannot at the moment be described as such, but which, if we do not pay attention to them, will become so.

I remind my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills—I remembered this today—that John F. Kennedy wrote a book called "While England Slept" in which he talked about the fact that this country nearly lost its independence and freedom because it failed to recognise the imminent threats and because it slept as the threats grew. Against that background, to engage in these issues and to pretend that the threats are well met by the present position is wrong.

I shall return to my normal balanced and calm role, with my responsibility as Chairman of the Intelligence and Security Committee. We take these matters seriously. We believe that the Security Service can bring a distinct package of skills to bear. However, in our report, which I hope the House found useful, we set out a number of concerns. We believe that the concerns are agreed between the parties, as our report makes clear. We believe that the primacy of responsibility must remain with the law enforcement agencies and that the Security Service should act only in support of them.

I support what the hon. Member for Blackburn said on this point; these are matters that need examination. I understand the arguments used by the Home Secretary who can pray in aid the Home Affairs Select Committee in support of his position. These are matters that the Standing Committee will have to address. I do not think that there is anything between us. The problem is how the role of the Security Service is defined in the Bill. There is no question of a secret Security Service police force being set up as a separate activity. The Security Service must act in support and the legislation must make that clear.

The point was well brought out by the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) when she asked whether information about warrants issued to the Security Service would go to the police authorities. She asked whether there would be self-tasking by the Security Service and whether it would appear to be going for warrants on its own initiative without the police knowing. That is an area of concern that must be clarified and on which my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary sought to reply earlier.

The Home Affairs Select Committee raised the point—I welcome the Home Secretary's response—about the police issuing their own warrants and about the activities of chief constables. We do not yet have information about how freely chief constables make use of their warrant powers; we would be grateful for further information on that. However, we welcome the fact that the Home Secretary is discussing the issue with the Association of Chief Police Officers so that we can get the matter clarified.

We also welcome the references in this debate to the need for a better definition of serious organised crime. As has been said, the present definition has been lifted from the Interception of Communications Act 1985. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (Mr. Ashby), whom I consulted and who is sitting behind the Home Secretary now. He advised me that the definition of somebody who was likely to receive three years for a first offence could include somebody who was guilty of a series of burglaries, of a mugging or of a wounding with intent. Those offences are clearly not intended to be covered by the Bill. There is no suggestion that a Secretary of State should be entitled to give a warrant for the interception of communications to the Security Service for crimes that, compared with serious organised crime as envisaged in the Bill, are petty although serious in the normal criminal sense. Clearly, that area needs attention.

The House will accept that the matters I have raised are ones for the Standing Committee. We believe that the general concept is widely supported. The issue that still needs attention, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary fairly recognised, is the development of a national crime squad. It could be argued that one should not proceed with the idea of introducing the Security Service into dealing with serious organised crime until one was clear with what body it would be working and what the ultimate arrangement in law enforcement would be. But that proposition has not been advanced by the Intelligence and Security Committee.

We believe that the issue is so important that with good sense and building on the work already being done by National Criminal Intelligence Service, there is every justification for making progress in introducing the Security Service and its distinct package of skills. However, we believe that there is a need for early understanding and for progress towards the arrangements within which the Security Service will ultimately work.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, when he introduced the proposal at the Conservative party conference in Blackpool, used a memorable phrase. He said that young people in this country were far less likely to be killed by an enemy missile than they were to be at risk from a drug dealer on the streets of our towns. That is right. The threats our young people face will be wider than that in the future. Pornography and a range of other matters can corrupt and undermine our society. The most effective action we can organise is justified.

The Security Service can make a significant and useful contribution against that background. I support the Bill on Second Reading and I support the need for sensible and constructive discussion in Committee to ensure that the valid concerns about the Bill are properly met.

5.18 pm

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): It is a pleasure to come out of the monastic seclusion of the Intelligence and Security Committee in the Cabinet Office and to be able to talk about the issues this afternoon. They are important, although my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) may think that they are trivial. I am a simplistic person who believes that, generally, the framework of law in a free society is there to protect people and not necessarily to restrict their freedom. I judge every measure that comes before the House in terms of how it will affect my constituents—the people who have elected me to Parliament.

At the outset, I endorse and support the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). I also welcome the Government's positive action in the matter. However, I am disappointed with the undue haste in legislating on that proposal. I do not know whether it is the result of a vacuum in the legislative programme, but it is putting the cart before the horse.

The issue that we considered in the Intelligence and Security Committee was in what way the Security Service might "plug in", if I may use that term, to the law enforcement agencies so that extremely limited resources might be deployed effectively. The general feeling that I get from speaking to people is that the Security Service is a massive organisation, which can deploy thousands of people, with huge resources, to that task.

As I represent a mining constituency, and having been through the miners' strike, I disagree profoundly with the theory that the Security Service has had only a very simple counter-espionage and counter-subversion role in the past few years. It is now fairly clear that it played some part in the miners' strike, but I do not want to go down that lane especially.

What disappoints me about the introduction of the Bill is the fact that, as the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King), the Chairman of the Intelligence and Security Committee, said, the setting up of the required working relationship is a complicated problem, which could not be resolved by the simple addition of a phrase to the Security Service Act 1989. It deserved far more than what is in the Bill. It is all very well to say, "We can resolve that problem in Committee", but according to the Home Secretary, we are talking about a short Bill of two or three clauses, which will be substantially amended or added to in Committee. That is not the way to introduce legislation.

There have been cries that that matter should be discussed on the Floor of the House in the way that the Security Service Bill was discussed in 1989. If, however, the matter goes into Committee upstairs, the House should consider what legislation will go up there. It is not good enough to say, "We tagged on a sentence to a previous Act and then let it be amended further in a different way." I know that it will be argued, and has been argued, that the Bill provides only a framework, but on a contentious matter, which may have profound constitutional implications, the devil will be in the detail and that detail must be hammered out. Therefore, I am disappointed that the Government did not take full note of the report that the Intelligence and Security Committee sent to the Prime Minister before the Christmas recess.

I am worried that the Bill is likely to undo the substantial progress that has been made in bringing the intelligence and security agencies out of the closet in the past few years. As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn said, it would be churlish not to congratulate the Government on what they have achieved. At the heart of the matter is the issue of using secret services in a free democracy as part of our everyday policing of that democracy. As Sir Paul Condon said in his 1995 Police Foundation lecture, which I referred to in an intervention earlier:

"there is a great belief and adherence in this country to the notion of individual freedom and liberty. Without doubt, people want to enjoy life unhindered by crime and the fear that it produces, and look to the police to enforce and maintain the law firmly. However, at the same time, they do not want intrusive methods, overt force or a lack of discretion to impose unnecessarily upon their everyday lives".

That is the balance that must be achieved in the argument and in the operation of the Bill.

One of the arguments that has been developed during the debate is that surrounding the question of whether there is a need for the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South suggested that the need was being invented. I could not disagree with him more profoundly, and I do not believe that most people, when they consider their constituency, would accept that a need is being created.

Regardless of what we may say in support and praise of the law enforcement agencies, there is no doubt in my mind that the battle against organised and serious crime is being lost on the streets of my constituency. I witness evidence of that in the tragedies that take place among young children—even some of junior school age—whose lives, freedoms, liberties and choices for the future are being circumscribed by the evil men who operate in the milieu that we are discussing.

Mr. Mullin: No one questions that there is a serious problem, especially in relation to drugs. What we question is whether the intelligence services, which do not have a very good record of accountability, are the appropriate way of tackling it. If it is such a big issue, why are we talking, as I understand that we are, about only 20 or 30 personnel being transferred to that work? It is quite a small matter. I therefore feel that that is a put-up job.

Mr. Rogers: That is where I disagree entirely with my hon. Friend. Perhaps we come from different positions and hold different attitudes about that, but I believe that it was Senator Barry Goldwater who said that extremism in defence of liberty is a virtue and moderation can be a vice. I shall return to that matter later.

In paragraph 7 of our report, the Committee said that there were

"certain key aspects that have not yet been fully resolved. They relate to the tasking, command, integration and accountability of the Service, particularly where its work extends into the operational field (in the areas of surveillance, agent handling and the use of technical devices); there is still much work to be done on the practicalities of co-operation in an area where the Service must operate clearly within the constraints of the Criminal Justice System."

I resent the idea that those of us who support the Bill are letting loose a monster on society. I do not believe that that is true. My experience of coming into contact with people who work in those services is that, by and

large, they are extremely dedicated people and very anxious that there should be a legislative framework in which they would operate. As I say, perhaps quite differently from my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South, having spent a year on the picket lines supporting the miners of my constituency, I will give way to no one in wanting the services and the law enforcement agencies made accountable. I am not coming from a position of weakness in that respect or trying to defend my attitude towards civil liberties or citizens' rights. There must be a balance, and we are trying to achieve that. That is what we are trying to argue today and, I hope, in Committee.

Mr. Ashby: I speak as someone who finds himself frequently, in those issues, on the side of the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin).

Did the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) hear the programme on Radio 4 this morning in which the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock) reminded us that the security services possibly had a massive, continually growing file on her in relation to her Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament activities many years ago? That would be inappropriate nowadays, in 1996, when we realise how trivial and how stupid it was, yet one recalls what one thought at the time and the way in which one operated. Things change.

How do the hon. Gentleman, and the Committee on which he serves, regard such matters? We must consider the relationship between the security forces and the police forces. It is a difficult aspect of policy. How does he regard it?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. This is turning into a small speech, not an intervention.

Mr. Rogers: At the press conference following the first meeting of the Committee, I was asked by journalists whether, during the first couple of weeks, I had been able to gain access to my MI5 file, detailing my membership of certain groups. I therefore quite understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying. He is right to say that society is dynamic and that things change. Our attitudes, too, must change; we must reflect what is going on outside and not become entrenched in dogmatic attitudes to the secret state. We could easily spend all year philosophically discussing the secret state in a democracy.

Our premier policeman, Sir Paul Condon, also said in his lecture of last year that he was not confident that we could enter the 21st century with the status quo in relation to combating organised and international crime. If our top policeman says that something is wrong, we should surely acknowledge his expert advice. I would not claim that Sir Paul is a spy under the bed, working against the interests of society at large. Given his attitude, and other evidence that I have seen, I believe that the status quo must be altered and that we have a duty to bring all our available resources to bear against these evil people.

International crime is soaring, and unless we do something about it now, the game will get ahead of us—perhaps irretrievably, as the Home Affairs Select Committee said last year in its excellent report. Frontiers are coming down, trade is expanding, financial services and technological developments are all making the profits from crime easier to recycle and launder.

One of the biggest problems for crime syndicates is disposing of their money. That is why I am disappointed by the fact that the Government do not regulate the City and our money markets with as much enthusiasm as they watch for social security swindlers, as they call them. Perhaps if they controlled some of the fat cats up the road a little more diligently, we would be more prepared to accept what they say about ordinary people who may cheat the social security system out of a pound or two.

There is no doubt that the evil people who control crime are winning the battle and are seizing every opportunity to do so. They exploit every weakness to expand their empires. As a result, in recent years we have all heard the cries for change.

The Select Committee did an excellent job for the country last year by publishing its comprehensive report. Its conclusion—that the fight against organised crime must involve more than just the usual law enforcement agencies—acted, perhaps, as a trigger for this debate. I am, however, concerned about the reticence expressed in paragraph 55:

> "While we recognise that intelligence gathering has a vital role to play in the fight against organised crime we do not conclude that the present situation yet calls for substantial inroads to be made into ordinary citizens' freedom from intrusion by the State".

We could all agree with that as a general statement, but it concerned arguments about the Government's right to examine tax records and other paperwork relating to people suspected of serious financial crimes.

In answer to an intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South, I referred to what Senator Barry Goldwater said in 1964:

> "Extremism in the defence of liberty is no vice; moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue".

That is why I fail to understand the moderation and reticence of the Home Affairs Select Committee on this point.

Mr. Bermingham: If my hon. Friend reads the whole of paragraph 55, he will find that we said that we had not examined the matter in detail and were therefore not in a position to make a recommendation. Does he agree that experience teaches that the last thing that a major criminal ever does is file a tax return?

Mr. Rogers: I cannot therefore see why the Select Committee, of which my hon. Friend is a member, referred to tax returns. I referred to them only because I saw them mentioned in the report.

Mr. Mullin: Is my hon. Friend aware that Goldwater also said that America should drop the nuclear bomb on Vietnam to blow the leaves off the trees so that the Americans could see whom they were fighting? I do not, however, see how that assists the debate.

Mr. Rogers: Neither do I. I wonder why my hon. Friend mentioned it—

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): I hope that my hon. Friend will accept from me that he is probably the only Labour Member of Parliament ever to quote Senator Barry Goldwater with approbation in a speech dealing with civil liberties. The Senator was one of the most reactionary, anti-democratic and anti-freedom people in the entire history of United States politics.

Mr. Rogers: In general I would agree, but he did get one thing right—the quotation I have given the House.

I return to the central point that there are evil people at large, even in our junior schools. Our children need protection from those criminals. There have been tragic

[Mr. Rogers]

suicides and overdoses; there have been ruined lives and parental heartbreaks. We are all aware of the increase in drug-related crime, and in muggings, assaults, robberies and car theft. People have a right to protection from such crimes—a fact to be borne in mind in any discussion of liberties.

My hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) and I last summer launched a drugs campaign at the beginning of the school holidays in our respective constituencies. I was amazed to learn the extent to which drug taking has infiltrated schools—the right hon. Member for Bridgwater has heard me say as much before. The idea is that people should be helped to help themselves, so in the Rhondda valley and in Taff-Ely we have set up drug awareness groups that can help, among other things, to relieve the misery of mothers whose kids have committed suicide or died from overdoses. They are in a good position to describe which citizens' rights need defending. They look to us to create a framework in which their rights can be defended.

I certainly agree with my hon. Friends who have intervened that a balanced measure is called for here. We cannot allow a secret organisation in our criminal justice system without a proper system of accountability.

Mr. Winnick: In an intervention, my hon. Friend said to my hon. Friend the Labour Front-Bench spokesman that, when we were considering last year's Bill, the amendments in Committee were probing amendments.

Mr. Rogers: Some of them were.

Mr. Winnick: Would I be right in saying that, when my hon. Friend, supported by all Labour Members, pressed from the Committee Front Bench that the scrutiny Committee should be accountable to Parliament, that was not a probing amendment? We were committing ourselves. With his experience of the Committee that he has been speaking about, does he agree that what we said in Committee is right and proper, even more so if MI5 is going to have its work extended? In the way in which the Committee operates, there should be proper accountability to Parliament; it should not simply be to the Prime Minister.

Mr. Rogers: It would be presumptuous of me to presume on the prerogative of the Leader of the Opposition, who I hope will be the next Prime Minister, and to say what his views will be about how the system will be organised. The day after he wins the next election, he will be responsible for the intelligence and security services, so it would be extremely presumptuous of me to prejudge his view in this matter.

However, as my hon. Friend has asked me, I can relate that matter only to the working of the Intelligence and Security Committee. Part of the problem that we are attempting to overcome is the extremely difficult dilemma of balancing the responsibility that we have been charged with statutorily with our responsibility to parliamentarians. As Committee members, we must have trust from both sides. We must have trust from the agencies that we are there to oversee, involving administration, finance and policy development, but we also have a responsibility to our fellow parliamentarians. Our first responsibility statutorily, however—there was no big argument about this in Committee following the amendments that we tabled—is to the Prime Minister who appointed us and who, in law, is responsible.

I accept that a dilemma exists and that there will be a dilemma for the Labour Government as to exactly how far they go in opening the intelligence and security services to the public gaze, but that matter is not for me: it is for the Leader of the Opposition or the next Prime Minister to expound himself. As I said, I would not be that presumptuous. However, I know that it is important to militate all resources in pursuit of crime.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: I am still puzzled at this. We are at some disadvantage in the House in that we cannot reach in and know the evidence that has led the hon. Gentleman to the conclusion that this formula of words or the Bill is appropriate. For instance, I do not know why it was not possible for the views of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis to be published by the Committee, unless there is some injunction against that, but I have not heard anything as to the balance of the argument. Who supports the measure? Do the police support the security services having a purchase into intimate domestic matters that affect our civil liberties, with all the panoply of the Official Secrets Act 1911—the right to designate individuals, the absolute offences attached therein, bugging—the whole thing? What was the clinching argument that convinced the hon. Gentleman that this is the appropriate way forward? Who supported it?

Mr. Rogers: I was coming to the accountability issue in relation to the Bill's proposals, with which I do not agree particularly. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman did not listen closely when I started my speech. I said that I was most disappointed by the fact that the Bill was only a one-sentence addition to the Security Service Act 1989. I have substantial reservations.

I did say that a Committee is not the place to amend such a short Bill and that we should not then lumber it with what the Home Secretary said he was prepared to take on board. It would have been far better if the Government had taken their time, and presented a far more comprehensive Bill so that we could have discussed it properly. Rightly, the issue is what is serious crime as described in the Bill.

The Home Affairs Select Committee rightly said—this is the basic issue that we should be considering—that

"the search for intelligence about organised criminal activity should not be hindered by concern about precise definitions of what is and what is not 'organised' crime."

In the desire to define organised crime, we should not hinder the pursuit of criminals. The NCIS and the Home Office, however, have come up with a definition. One could read at great length those different definitions, but why did not the Government wait until publication and consider the Intelligence and Security Committee's report, where we discuss the problems of serious and organised crime, before publishing the Bill?

A simple illustration will demonstrate my point. Sexual child abuse could be an individual act; that is a serious crime. The collective acts of paedophile and child pornography rings are also serious crimes, but they are organised crime. Surely we are not suggesting that the security services should be involved in individual criminal acts, but that is the suggestion in clause 2(3B)(a) and (b). That is why I have substantial reservations about the Bill.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): I have been listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman's excellent speech. On his last point, I can see

a danger. He seems to be arguing in favour of the use of the word "organised" and the paedophile ring that he has taken as an example may be a good one. Would he not be concerned that, if we had a definition using the word "organised", some serious paedophile offenders with some clever lawyers might escape justice and walk scot free because they managed to prove to the courts that, although they were serious criminals, they were not organised as such, or the Security Service would be found to have been acting inappropriately in pursuing people who proved that they were not organised?

Mr. Rogers: Frankly, that is a trivial point. If the Government's legislative lawyers cannot come up with a decent form of words other than what is in the Bill, I should like to know what they are being paid for. I do not know whether the phrase "serious and/or organised crime" could be incorporated in the Bill, but I hope that the Government will not leave it in this simplistic context.

Mr. Ashby *rose—*

Mr. Rogers: I do not want to give way again as I want to conclude my speech simply by saying again why I have strong reservations about the Bill. As I said at the beginning of my speech, this measure puts the cart before the horse. The policing structures in Great Britain are not available to use the security services' resources to the best advantage.

As was said earlier in the debate, we all want police forces to maintain their traditional impartiality and to be accountable to local communities. Those are the real strengths in protecting and preserving individual freedoms, but, manifestly, the present structures do not work and the battle is being lost. Everyone who has considered the matter, from the Home Affairs Select Committee, to the Association of Chief Police Offers, the National Criminal Intelligence Service, the security services, and anyone and everyone who has given evidence on this matter, acknowledges that. Sir Paul Condon's phrase, that in some places the foundation is too weak to sustain additional pressure and change, is correct.

Although I welcome the fact that the Security Service is to be involved in organised and serious crime, I feel that the Government have not given sufficient consideration to the structure of the Bill to allow it to pass Second Reading without some criticism.

5.50 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary said that the Bill was short and—I think he said—sensible. I trust that my contribution will be the same; it will certainly be short.

Over Christmas, I received letters about drugs from four children from Whetstone in my constituency. The children were aged between eight and 11, and I suspect that their primary school teacher might have put them up to it. All the children—the oldest was Simon Clay, aged 11—said that they were worried about drugs, and that the Government should do something about it. I am delighted that our drugs education programme is getting through. All four letters suggested that we should employ what they called "the secret service" to deal with drug dealers. I suggest that out of the mouths of babes and sucklings comes the truth.

In the city of Leicester, if not in my constituency, organised crime, particularly drug dealing and trafficking, is rife, and we see the problems spreading. In the past fortnight, there have been shootings in Belfast by a deceitful IRA front organisation called Direct Action Against Drugs. It claims to be against people involved in drugs.

Violence is certainly perceived as increasing in our society. There has been the business with knives, and in the past six weeks we have seen the tragic murder of Mr. Lawrence. We have seen guns used more often and police being assaulted. In the past couple of days, a chief constable has expressed his concern in the newspapers. All that is often linked to gangs. Three apparent drug dealers—I cannot comment from knowledge—were murdered in a Range Rover beside a reservoir in Essex during the past month.

In the House, we are often accused of being out of touch. It is true that we are insulated. The hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers), who made what was generally an extremely sensible speech, said that we are not necessarily at the front line in the war against drugs. That is fair. We do not hang around in playgrounds or on campuses where drug dealers are to be found.

To a certain extent, we are insulated by virtue of our age as well as our life style from the reality of much of the drug dealing in the back streets of our inner cities. The people of our country are not insulated, and, as the hon. Member for Rhondda said, the parents of young people who are at risk from drugs and criminal violence want sensible action for themselves and their children.

Violence is the most frightening manifestation of organised crime, but the power and the rackets of syndicates, whether from Latin America or south-east Asia, can and do spread. Organised crime involving the Mafia, the so-called Russian mafia, eastern European groups and other international groups is becoming more evident in western Europe.

As I have said, drugs are an obvious manifestation, but, as the Select Committee report pointed out, the international organised crime groups are involved in other huge and lucrative rackets such as counterfeit currency, money laundering, smuggling, illegal immigrants—that was mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King)—possibly nuclear smuggling, illegal weapons dealing and high-technology crime, which, although I do not understand it, is certainly understood by them. They might be involved in prostitution—although I believe that the white slave trade is a bit outdated—and a raft of other criminal activities which threaten the fabric of our society. It may sound as if I am overstating the issue, but to some people in our cities, such problems are a grave worry every minute of their day.

I fear that we are less likely now to find honour among thieves. Those kindly avuncular crooks such as Fagin have been replaced by ruthless and violent gangs who will intimidate police officers, prison officers, judges and juries as well as the families of those people. Sadly, that is a growing problem, and the man and woman in the street, if they still exist, fear organised crime and the increase in violence which are typified by the shootings and stabbings I have mentioned.

With tongue in cheek, the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) suggested, to a certain extent rightly, that the job of the security services now has less to do with countering Soviet spies. That is self-evident. Threats to the United Kingdom remain, but the KGB and eastern

[Mr. Andrew Robathan]

European security services have changed. I recall the activities of the Bulgarian secret service agent, although I cannot remember his name—

Mr. Allason: Georgi Markov.

Mr. Robathan: I thank my hon. Friend. He was murdered on a bridge with the tip of an umbrella, which introduced cyanide or some other poison into his system. Such agents no longer exist.

I fear that some opponents of the Bill have watched too many James Bond films and read too much Le Carré. They tend to see anybody in the security services as a cross between Walter Mitty and a character from the pages of Fleming or Gerald Seymour. Indeed, such people do exist—I remember Mr. Bettany, who was a Walter Mitty character.

The vast majority are not like that. When I was in the Army, I saw a little of the work of the Security Service, and I can speak with some experience. I was generally impressed by the hard-working and highly capable people who were often using extremely sophisticated equipment which required complicated training. They showed great skill in gathering intelligence.

Violent international organised crime is not so dissimilar to subversion and terrorism, which the Security Service is used to combating. The Security Service is an excellent organisation, which, as has been said, is perhaps not used as intensively as it was. It is as well suited to assisting in the battle against organised crime as it has been to dealing with previous threats against our society.

The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) made a speech which I thought was generally very sensible. He mentioned our local county police forces and supported that system. I also support that structure. It is well liked, and I wish to see it continue. I do not believe that a national police force such as that mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (Mr. Ashby) would find favour with the population. Organised crime is not just based in a county such as Leicestershire or in the Metropolitan police area. The need for national organisations is well understood. I am glad to see that the DNA database which was set up recently is working.

Mr. Ashby: That is national.

Mr. Robathan: As my hon. Friend says, it is a national database.

Mr. Bermingham: Will the hon. Gentleman accept that the problem with local police forces, regional crime squads and the security services is caused by funding? For example, the NCIS will often develop from its computer information about a particular group of people who are seeking to import drugs. It may be that regional crime squad No. five—the south-east regional crime squad—is allocated. It then has to go to, for example, the Essex police or Kent police to ask whether it is all right to act. I have been told that, on a number of occasions, the necessary funds have not been available. Unless there is a national funding system, things fall apart, and the criminals are not caught.

Mr. Robathan: That is a good point. I am not against nationally based organisations. I wish to see our police force developed further, while remaining based in local areas. There is great affection for that system within local populations. The hon. Gentleman mentioned drug dealing, which we are discussing today, but crime in the streets of his constituency or my constituency may remain local, and should be dealt with locally as far as possible. The hon. Gentleman made a good point about funding, which, although it is a real issue, is possibly not the issue being dealt with today.

I should like to see the national Security Service used against national and international crime in the way that has been described. It is a development of our resources, and I believe that the development of institutions is usually better than any revolutionary or radical change.

This Bill will consolidate the existing organisations and improve their workings and usage. The people on the streets of Britain want action against organised crime, which concerns them greatly, so they will welcome the employment of the Security Service in the fight against crime. Liberal Democrat opposition to the Bill is but another example of slightly misguided ideology—putting so-called civil liberties before the liberties of all citizens of the United Kingdom, who should be allowed to live their lives and go about their lawful business in freedom and security.

I ask my right hon. Friend the Minister to take account of two related concerns. First, the workings of the Security Service must remain covert and secret. Details about operational techniques or individual security officers should not be revealed in open court. We need to protect the weapon—the body—that we want to use against organised crime. Officers will not be operating in uniform; they will be operating covertly.

Secondly, the people who will try to find out details about the service and the techniques will be clever lawyers working for the benefit of clients who may or may not be criminals with powerful, violent organisations behind them. If we want the Security Service—the secret service, as it was called by my constituents aged eight to 11—to remain secure, we must ensure that the law does not undermine that by demanding the identity of security officers.

That matter was raised by the hon. Member for Blackburn. I fully accept his point that accountability is important, but on this occasion the hon. Gentleman and I take different positions. I trust that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary can reassure me that the work of the Security Service will not be undermined or negated by slick, clever, overpaid lawyers.

Mr. Ashby: In my hon. Friend's reference to a slick, clever, overpaid lawyer, does he mean a lawyer who gets an innocent man acquitted or a guilty man convicted?

Mr. Robathan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who, as a lawyer, is right on cue. Indeed, he obviously has personal experience of the issue. I do not think that any hon. Member would want innocent people to be convicted, but many in this House, as well as many people less insulated from the workings of society, are concerned that our criminal justice

system enables barristers to be paid so much money that they work to obtain acquittals for clients who, in their hearts, they believe might be guilty.

Mr. Ashby: Those barristers get £180 a day.

Mr. Robathan: Apparently, the poor barristers get only £180 a day. However, I have met one or two who earn a great deal more than a quarter of a million pounds a year. Perhaps they have obtained acquittals for one or two guilty men.

I welcome the Bill, which I believe will play a valuable role in the fight against organised crime. It will be welcomed by everyone in the country except criminals, organised crime syndicates and, perhaps, Liberal Democrats.

6.3 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I am glad to have the opportunity to say that I accept that there is a useful role for the Security Service in assisting in the fight against organised crime. Our amendment sets out the ways in which we believe the Bill does not satisfy that objective. It almost exactly parallels the report of the Intelligence and Security Committee, which I hope the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) will read. It explains why we think that the Bill should have been cast in a different way.

Another danger arising not just from the hon. Gentleman's speech but from some other speeches is that we might create expectations that the proposed changes cannot satisfy. It will be of no service to those who work in MI5 to create expectations that cannot reasonably be satisfied.

My assumption is that the numbers of staff initially made available will be very small, so that the number of inquiries in which they can be involved must also be very small. Perhaps only a bare handful of inquiries will be undertaken at any one time. We must not lead people to expect that the massive problems of drug trafficking, violent crime, international criminal organisations and all manner of other offences—even prostitution, which the hon. Member for Blaby mentioned—can be significantly tackled by such a small number of people.

The suggestion by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, in response to Dame Stella Rimington, the Director-General of the Security Service, was that the analytical skills of the Security Service could be brought to bear in cracking some of the criminal syndicates. It could usefully supplement the capacity of the police if those skills were brought to bear in an appropriate way. However, I do not believe that the Bill will secure that. It does not match the intentions described by the Home Secretary today.

To some extent, I was reassured by what the Home Secretary said he sought to do through the Bill. However, as he said it, I was reminded of a remark by the current Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, in another context—that, having taken a Bill to a Special Standing Committee where it was examined in a more inquisitorial way, he quickly discovered that it did not meet the purposes for which it had been drafted, and even with amendment could not be made to meet those purposes. Ministers sometimes set out their intentions but then find that a Bill does not meet them.

If the Security Service is to use the capacity that I have described in support of the law enforcement agencies, it must be on a tasked basis. That is how the Secret Intelligence Service and GCHQ currently support law enforcement internationally. They are asked to do certain things to back up the attempt to crack international drug smuggling or to locate organised gangs trying to commit crimes. They set about those tasks and then provide the authorities concerned with helpful intelligence that can be acted upon.

The Bill does not provide such a procedure for Security Service involvement in the fight against organised crime. The police lead is not specified in the Bill. I would be much happier if it were made clear in the Bill, as the Committee suggested in its report, that the work must be in support of the law enforcement agencies. If we do not get that right, we run the risk of undermining the authority and confidence of the police.

The Bill does not deal with the present differences in the way that the Security Service operates. Its director-general has a responsibility to interpret the remit of the service and to decide the priorities, in a way that does not apply to the directors of the other two services in the area. They are tasked by Departments to do certain things.

The Security Service has a unique responsibility to consider the matters within its remit and assess the extent to which they represent a threat to the security of the state or the economic well-being of the country, and then to take appropriate action. The service reports to the Home Secretary on that action, but the tasking responsibility lies with the service. If we imported that procedure into the work of the Security Service as it relates to the police and organised crime, it would not fit with what the Home Secretary envisaged in his description—it would be a very different structure indeed.

Theoretically, if the Security Service were to operate on the same basis as it does in other areas, it would decide whether the priority was gang warfare in Manchester, for example, and then deal with it independently—whether or not the chief constable of Manchester thought that it was the highest priority or that it was not currently being sufficiently tackled by the resources available to him.

Mr. Rogers: As I understood the Home Secretary, he said that the Security Service, in its envisaged role, would be tasked by the National Criminal Intelligence Service. I realise the implications of that, but the right hon. and learned Gentleman did cite a precise tasking master.

Mr. Beith: I was pleased to hear the Home Secretary use those words, but the NCIS is not mentioned in the Bill. Indeed, the notion that the Security Service will be tasked by anybody is not mentioned in the Bill. The parent Act gives the Security Service the responsibility to assess for itself where the threat lies and where to deploy its resources.

My experience as a member of the Intelligence and Security Committee, albeit for only a short time, is that the services work to their statutory remits and that they are different. The culture of the services that have a tasked relationship with customers—that is, the SIS and GCHQ—is different from that of the Security Service. It is the direct and proper result of the fact that the statutes are framed differently.

The Home Secretary's civil servants—perhaps for ease of drafting—have simply hung the change that he wants to make on the peg of the existing remit. The Intelligence

[Mr. Beith]

and Security Committee sought to explain why that would not work unless the remit was restricted in some way. Unless it is made clear that the work has to be undertaken in support of the law enforcement agencies and with their consent, it will import an inappropriate new kind of self-tasking into the fight against organised crime, which in no way corresponds with what the Home Secretary says that he is seeking to do.

My concern is further underlined by the way in which the Bill is drafted in respect of the co-ordination between the Security Service and the police. The Director-General of the Security Service is told, as it were, to write the rules for co-ordination between the Security Service and the police. The Bill casts on the director-general the responsibility for ensuring that arrangements for co-ordination are in place. A strange back-door way of specifying that co-ordination should exist has been found.

It is not adequate to let—in effect—the Security Service write its own rules. I do not say that because I think that it will do so in any improperly motivated way. I just do not think that it is a sensible way to do it. We do not give the police such responsibility. We do not tell them that it is their job to arrange co-ordination with the local community. We enact provision for police authorities. We enact the main features of the relationship between the police and the rest of the community, and we should do the same with the Security Service.

The rules which are to be set up for co-ordination are not subject to approval by anybody. They are not the subject of a statutory instrument which comes before the House, nor do they have to go before the Intelligence and Security Committee. Once the director-general is satisfied that arrangements exist, the machine can start and roll into effect. Her or his decision that the arrangements are in place is sufficient to start the clock, which is not satisfactory.

A further weakness in the Bill is that there is no national structure into which all the proposals are being plugged. The National Criminal Intelligence Service is not mentioned in the Bill. The police national squad is still a creature of Government speculation and imagination rather than reality. The Prime Minister set out the idea in his speech but, as I quoted earlier, the Scottish Office said that the feasibility of the idea—the principle of it—was still being examined so far as it affected Scotland.

We are being invited to grant the Security Service the right to a relationship with a police national structure which might exist in a year's time. It might be UK-wide; it might just affect England and Wales. It is not clear.

Mr. Rogers: It is putting the cart before the horse.

Mr. Beith: As the hon. Gentleman says, it is putting the cart before the horse.

I have not yet been convinced by the evidence that I have been shown that so much can be achieved in the months between the Bill going through the House and the decision on the national squad and Scotland to make its passing absolutely essential before the Government have completed their consultations on wider matters.

Indeed, if the matters are so important, why have the Government not got on with them? After all, the statement was made at the Conservative party conference in the autumn. One assumes that, if the Prime Minister makes a statement on a new policy at the party conference, he has already done some of the work on it, or some of it has been done on his behalf. Perhaps that is too generous an assumption. The work had not been done at all. The speech was the beginning of the idea. Surely the Government could put some more expedition into the consultation, so that, by the time the Bill has reported, we know what system we are trying to plug the mechanism into.

If we do not get it right, some rather disturbing possibilities could arise, of which we must take account when considering a constitutional Bill. For example, the Security Service could undertake a task because it had a different order of priorities from the police. It could undertake a task because it believed that the Hampshire police were not according sufficient priority to certain aspects of organised crime in their area, and could therefore carry out investigations. I do not think that that is what the Home Secretary envisages, but the Bill leaves that possibility open.

Indeed, because of the way in which the Bill is drafted, the Home Secretary could decide, because he was under political pressure and was being challenged about something going on in Merseyside, to tell the Security Service that it ought to investigate something to which he thought the Merseyside police were not giving sufficient attention. Again, I do not think that that is what the Home Secretary is telling us he wants to do. Why write a Bill that is open to such interpretation?

The issue of warrants has also been left to be resolved later. The Home Secretary referred to it, and said quite rightly that he was not satisfied with the present arrangements concerning the police and wanted to improve them. It is notable to those of us with civil liberties concerns that the Security Service system for the approval of warrants is better than the police system. The Security Service system requires specific authorisation by Ministers, and is subject to quite a thorough review procedure. We have certainly had the opportunity to ask the judges who undertake it questions about how it is carried out.

In the police forces, the chief constable makes arrangements for the approval of intervention on property—the difference does not apply to communications. The system is not ideal for police officers, because they are open to action for civil trespass; there are all sorts of problems with it.

If the two systems run side by side, it will be extremely confusing and would open up the possibility that, in a joint operation, Security Service personnel could say to the police, "Look, our warrant procedure is terribly cumbersome. Let us do it on one of your warrants. You have only to ask the chief constable. Let us not bother with our rigmarole of going to the Home Secretary." The purpose of the warrant system would be defeated in order to get on with something that the Security Service felt was urgent. Such confusion should not be left in the drafting and passing of new legislation.

If the police are not told about a warrant issued to the Security Service in respect of their area, ridiculous possibilities arise. My hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) mentioned them to me earlier.

Let us say that a Security Service operative, acting on a Home Office warrant, is seen by a next-door neighbour, who rings the police. The police could come dashing in

to arrest the Security Service personnel, totally unaware that the operation is supposedly in support of them. It must be co-ordinated. I think that most chief constables would expect to know if an operation was taking place in their area, and it is reasonable that they should know, and be able to make the appropriate arrangements. If they are to do their jobs properly, they should be given that opportunity.

We have not quite resolved the danger of divided accountability, although it is difficult to resolve. The Security Service is directly responsible to the Home Secretary for its actions and the police are responsible to their local police authority, but there are no arrangements in the Bill to resolve that discrepancy.

It is not clear to whom the public would complain. If an operation were carried out in support of the police in the pursuit of organised crime and a member of the public was affected because it went wrong, would they complain to the Police Complaints Authority, or to the Security Commission?

We also have a problem about the definition of organised crime. Some adverse comment was made about the use of "organised" in the definition. I have forgotten which Government Member was complaining about it. [HON. MEMBERS: "The Minister."] I must therefore draw the Minister's attention to the fact that, when the Prime Minister announced the proposal to the Conservative party conference, it was intended to tackle organised crime. That was what the Prime Minister said. He talked about a problem with organised crime with which the security services could help. We cannot now say that "organised crime" are unhelpful words to use in this context. To tackle it was the whole purpose of the exercise.

Organised crime can be committed at any one of a number of levels. A gang of kids raiding several sweetshops is an organised crime, but not what we would consider serious. Some serious crimes are not highly organised, such as murders and sex offences, as hon. Members have said, but are very serious. Such crimes do not have the element of organisation which the Security Service can help tackle. Indeed, that led the Committee to conclude that the Bill should deal with serious organised crime—that is what we are talking about.

I must also mention the problem of giving evidence before the courts. It relates not only to the fact that Security Service officers would, in some cases, have to appear, yet their identity be concealed, because otherwise the rest of their work would be impaired, but to the fact that the Security Service is not geared to the preparation of cases to bring before courts as the police are. That emphasises that the added value that the Security Service can bring into crime detection and prevention is in the analysis, and, to some extent, the gathering, of information from that analysis. It will need the police to ensure that a case is properly prepared to bring before courts and put to the Crown Prosecution Service.

The Intelligence and Security Committee report comments quite strongly on a number of the points that I have mentioned. It is a unanimous report.

The Home Secretary paid tribute to the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) for his work on that Committee. I happily endorse that tribute. A truly valuable endorsement, however, would be to have the Committee's recommendations properly dealt with in the Standing Committee. It would be an empty tribute if all the advice of the Intelligence and Security Committee is ignored. Although the Bill and the report of the Intelligence and Security Committee were published on the same day, the Committee considered the possibility that the Bill would appear in its present form. It was alarmed by that, and set out a number of ways in which the Bill could address those issues which must be considered.

There has been rather too much pressure to go ahead with one part of the jigsaw before the other pieces have been put in place. It is not too late to remedy that oversight. It could be done in the Standing Committee, particularly if the Home Secretary is prepared to ensure that we enact what he told the House today. The timetable, however, has been determined a bit too much by party conferences and imminent elections and things of that kind. As a result, confusion has arisen, which runs the risk of undermining the police rather than assisting them.

When the proposals were announced at the Conservative party conference, I was struck by the idea that, had they been announced in the House, answers would have had to be prepared for questions such as: is the national squad for the whole United Kingdom or is it just for England; and will the squad be linked with the NCIS or will there be two separate bodies? Consideration of the Bill will be difficult, because those questions are still unresolved, which shows that things have been put in the wrong order.

It is not too late to put matters right. We should be quite clear, however, that the legislation could—if we get it right—enable the Security Service to give limited but valuable assistance to the police in analysing criminal gangs in order to track them down, bring some of them to justice and prevent some serious crimes. The legislation will not be the revolution we should love to have—one which drastically reduces serious crime. If we get the legislation wrong, we will do no service to the police or to the Security Service.

6.21 pm

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): May I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the work of the Security Service and its personnel? I should also like to recall the tragic loss of five members of the Security Service who died in the Chinook helicopter crash. That was the largest disaster that has ever befallen the Security Service in the first or second world wars and at any time in the post-war era. It was a reminder of the risk that people who work in the Security Service must face daily. Anybody with any experience of terrorism or the murky world of intelligence and counter-intelligence is aware of the serious pitfalls that exist.

I should also like to pay tribute to the retiring Director-General of the Security Service. She has done more than most people to try to foster a sense of responsibility in the media in their dealings with the work of the Security Service. She has presented herself and her organisation in a rational and coherent fashion. It is because of her and her recently retired legal adviser, David Bickford, that Opposition Members, who for some years expressed serious concerns about the kind of people who work in the Security Service, have had an opportunity to meet those people and to discuss relevant topics and issues with them. They, too, now recognise the important work carried out by the service and the

[Mr. Rupert Allason]

dedication of the individuals involved. The people who work for the service are not right-wing fanatics. They are not all bugging and burgling their way across London, as was alleged by Peter Wright and subsequently disproved.

In paying tribute to the Security Service, we should take care not to put it on a pedestal. The service is no panacea to the troubles that have befallen our country—the scale of the threat to the country cannot be underestimated. All hon. Members have received letters such as that described by my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan). People have genuine concerns about their communities, in which they see their neighbourhoods, friends and families crumbling because of the invidious influence of the drug pushers.

The media coverage during the past four or five weeks has demonstrated time and again how perfectly ordinary and reasonable families with good standards and backgrounds can be terribly undermined by the effect of drugs on youngsters. Drug dealers operate in neighbourhoods in Liverpool, Bristol and elsewhere, even in my own constituency of Torbay. The police sometimes feel powerless to enter some properties and consider that they do not have the resources to maintain the kind of sophisticated surveillance they think might enable them to deal with the drug barons. Picking up the dealers on the street is one way to deal with the drug problem, but the key has to be long-term intelligence collection and long-term surveillance in order finally to get to the drug kingpins.

The threat from organised crime is well established, although it can of course be exaggerated. The Home Affairs Select Committee has done a commendable job in studying the true scale of the problem. We are all aware—particularly those who have been involved in studying the problem in the United States and the work of the Drug Enforcement Agency and the Central Intelligence Agency—that in the United States an entire civilisation is at risk from the drug pedlars. That country is being eaten alive by the people who prey off the dependency and weakness of others.

The United Kingdom has a pretty good record in dealing with drug smugglers. When it comes to money laundering, the British Secret Intelligence Service is regarded as one of the world's experts in the monitoring, identification and prevention of that activity, which is of course directly allied to drug smuggling.

There is widespread acceptance that the British authorities have been outmanoeuvred and outgunned for a long period not only by organised crime but by small gangs of individuals. The police find it difficult to cope with them because there are 43 different police forces with 43 different police computer systems, none of which is compatible with each other. That is why there is talk now of a national police force.

Crime is extremely mobile, and that was part of the incentive for creating regional crime squads. We are talking now about a national crime squad. When the suggestion was made that there should be the equivalent of a national detective service—the equivalent perhaps of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the United States—there were serious concerns about having a national police structure, particularly from some of the far-flung regional police forces and the police committees. We have got over that hurdle.

I welcome the proposition for a national DNA register and especially the way in which special branch has been at the forefront of co-ordinating and liaising with separate police forces. That is the way forward. Harnessing that technology will also provide police with an opportunity to fight crime. I believe that the national DNA register may make the crime of rape one of the most easily detectable in the next century, and I welcome that.

Mr. Robathan: Is my hon. Friend aware that, as I understand it, 170 cases are already being pursued because the DNA register has produced a match?

Mr. Allason: I welcome the way in which modern technology can be harnessed in support of the community to prevent, deter and detect crime. Indeed, I shall go further and say that I would be pleased to see a national paedophile register. There are also many other areas in which crime could be tackled on a national basis.

We all understand the scale of the threat to this country, but the question before us today has nothing to do with that scale. The question is whether a particular very small organisation that has been in existence since 1909, with a fascinating history, is the appropriate organisation to deal with crime on that scale.

First, I ask: what is the catalyst, the incentive, for the Bill? I recall asking in 1989 what the catalyst was for the Security Service Bill, as it then was. The question was shrugged off, and it was suggested to me that it was unpatriotic to inquire why a particular Bill should be presented.

An Opposition Member suggested, cynically I thought, that an attempt was being made to outmanoeuvre the provisions of an anticipated judgment in the European Court of Human Rights. I must admit that that Member turned out to be absolutely correct. The United Kingdom was under an obligation to introduce the accountability and protection introduced by the Security Service Act in November 1989.

We should be worried about the danger of making a virtue of a necessity, and that is where the concern, on which the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) has already touched, lies. What precisely has driven this particular legislation at this particular time?

Certainly the provisionals are not out of business in Northern Ireland. The Irish National Liberation Army remains a potent threat, as do the loyalist paramilitaries. There also certainly remains a threat from eastern Europe. Anybody concerned about the proliferation of chemical, biological, bacteriological and nuclear weapons must be worried.

It is not unreasonable that, as Mrs. Rimington has stated, the Security Service should flex its muscles and analytical skills in that context. If the prospects of Islamic fundamentalism, of terrorism, of nuclear components falling into the wrong hands and of people being able to manufacture viable nuclear devices do not fall into the category of a serious threat to the realm, I do not know what does.

I supported the extension of the Security Service's power into counter-proliferation, but I had considerable reservations when it was proposed to extend its power into counter-terrorism. I shall explain to the House in a moment why I had those reservations.

The fact is that in the current climate the Security Service has, in a sense, run out of things to do. There is, thank God, a ceasefire in Northern Ireland, and there is a

skill deficit in the eastern bloc countries that posed a threat to this nation in the past. To that extent, the Security Service has to deal with a slight gap.

Over the years, the service has built up extraordinary skills in surveillance and monitoring, and in the collection, collation and distribution of intelligence. Nobody who has studied the service can doubt the tremendous skills available to it. The surveillance skills are remarkable. It should not be forgotten that the terrorist provisionals who went down to Gibraltar were under constant surveillance by the Security Service.

We are talking about dedicated men and women who operate in all sorts of environments and who are literally never noticed. Their operations are not like an episode of "The Bill", with a detective sergeant pushing a camera out of a window at something across the street. The skills that the Security Service can deploy are extraordinarily sophisticated.

Of course it is a tremendous waste for those skills to lie idle for any period; so there is certainly a case for what within the intelligence community is called "taking in washing". That is, in order to retain the surveillance skills and the technology within a closed, classified and controlled environment, the service can be given tasks and then report to a particular police agency or organisation, providing it with an enormous dossier on an individual target. I am well aware of the work that the Security Service could do in the way of taking in washing.

I want to say something about the way in which the Security Service has presented its case in connection with the Bill. I am concerned about the public relations campaign that has been mounted to allow it to extend its role. The speed has been astonishing.

On 13 October the Prime Minister announced that the role of the Security Service would be extended. The Bill was, I believe, published on the day the House rose for the Christmas recess—a slightly odd time for Members of Parliament wanting to complete their Christmas shopping to have to engage with the minutiae of important and serious legislation. To schedule the Second Reading for the day after the House returns from the recess also shows undue haste, especially as the Government response to the Select Committee report was published only yesterday.

In my judgment, we have had a very short time in which to study the Government's response, to look into the detail of the Bill and to try to get advice. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King), who has taken evidence on the Bill from an undisclosed number of people, but I am afraid that Back Benchers have not had the same opportunity to talk to those who may have an expert opinion on the subject.

The haste with which the Bill has been presented to the House gives me some cause for concern. The campaign has certainly been well orchestrated. The Security Service even appointed a director of corporate affairs to liaise with Whitehall and promote the proposition that the service should go beyond taking in washing.

Is the Bill the consequence of a direct threat to the realm from organised crime, or has it appeared because the Security Service is seeking a role in a changing world? That is one of the issues that the House will have to address.

It is suggested that the Security Service has special analytical skills that it can devote to organised crime, so as to "crack it". The analytical skills of the Security Service relate first to the collection and collation of intelligence. Ninety per cent. of this work is in the development of individual, personal and subject files, which are very detailed, comprehensive and bureaucratic. They are not always accurate but, by and large, they are pretty good. The files are supported by the work of the special branches across the provinces. The analytical skills which Mrs. Rimington described extend to the other activities in which the Security Service indulges in order to be able to create those files, including the interception of mail and other communications and the running of agents.

Here we reach the first hint of concern, because the Security Service is certainly skilled at running agents. The skills of an agent handler are particularly difficult, and are acquired only after a long period. But the House must not forget that the business of running agents is also conducted by detectives, who run informants, and by special branch officers, who operate to very specific Home Office guidelines. So I would ask the Minister whether the Home Office guidelines that apply to the running of informants will be extended to deal with the way in which the Security Service might run agents to deal with organised crime.

I shall now refer to the Security Service itself, and whether the service is the organisation best suited to take on organised crime. Within the service, there is by no means a unanimous view on this subject. There is certainly a widespread belief that the organisation is in some difficulty because of the lack of a perceived threat from the traditional areas of responsibility of the Security Service.

With the indulgence of the House, I shall briefly describe the background of the Security Service, because it has not changed considerably in all the years it has existed since 1909. There have been two dramatic changes—one in 1989, and the other which is being contemplated today. Back in 1883, the Fenian bomb outrages in London prompted the creation of what was then known as the Irish special branch. Metropolitan police detectives—some with the skill of Gaelic—were collected together to fight the manifestation of Irish nationalism on our streets. Curiously, the newspaper headlines of 1883 were remarkably similar to those of 1993, with bomb outrages in Whitehall, and so on.

The special branch was created for the single purpose of fighting the manifestation of Irish nationalism but, because of a specific case involving the *Globe* newspaper, it went on to deal with official secrets. Official secrets legislation was passed in 1889 as a consequence of the disclosure of secrets in the *Globe*. It turned out that, despite the protests of the Foreign Secretary of the time, the details of the Anglo-Russian treaty produced in the newspaper were entirely correct. An attempt was made to investigate the source of the leak to the *Globe*, and it turned out that a journalist was involved.

Happily, at that time the Foreign Office employed fewer than 100 people, some of them on a part-time basis. One of those employees turned out to be journalist, and he was charged under the terms of the Larceny Act because it was believed that he had stolen a copy of the treaty. I know about this case only because my great-great-great uncle was the prosecuting counsel, and he entirely screwed it up. The Larceny Act depended on the theft of an actual item, and the gentleman who had "stolen" the text of the Anglo-Russian treaty turned out to have a photographic memory—he had stolen nothing.

[Mr. Allason]

The case was dismissed, and my great-great-great uncle, Sir Harry Poland, did not survive as a Treasury counsel for very much longer. As a consequence of that case, legislation on official secrets came before the House. In 1914, defence of the realm legislation was introduced to deal with German espionage and the perceived threat therefrom. After the first world war, two further official secrets measures were introduced to deal with the interception of communications.

Since 1909, when it came into existence under the leadership of Major-General Sir Vernon Kell, the Security Service has had roles in counter-espionage, counter-sabotage and counter-subversion. That continued through the second world war and on to the introduction of positive vetting in 1950, when a Labour Administration realised that there was a serious threat to this country of penetration of the establishment by communists and others who did not subscribe to a parliamentary system of government. That change was not dramatic, because it was covered by the category of counter-subversion.

It was only the desire of the Security Service to extend its role into counter-terrorism in very recent years that made a difference. This was really the first time that the Security Service had started to get involved in the criminal justice system. I opposed that change, because I believe that a terrorist who commits homicide is guilty of murder. It is not a political crime, and I believe such cases should be dealt with by the criminal justice system. The moment one makes a special case for those people, one is in danger of undermining the validity of their convictions.

I have always wanted the police to continue their principal role in counter-terrorism. Even when the Security Service was introduced into Northern Ireland, the police always had the prime responsibility for investigating terrorism and conducting counter-terrorism operations. The reason for that was that the Security Service has always been reluctant to be accused of acting like the Gestapo. People who lived through the second world war remember the tactics adopted by the Gestapo and the secret police in totalitarian countries. They will also recall the way in which the tribunals operated in this country against suspected enemy aliens who were due for internment under the provisions of section 18(b) of the defence of the realm legislation. That was an unhappy period in our history, and there is still concern—as there was then—that the Security Service should never be tarred with the accusation that it had become secret police.

I recall being told that one of the ambitions of intelligence officers was to avoid being engaged in work that would bring to them that kind of opprobrium, as it is often forgotten that the Security Service can operate only with the support of the community. Running a surveillance operation means going to private householders, asking for their support and for facilities and explaining a part of what the objective of the operation is. Therefore, Security Service officers have been very careful in the past to avoid getting involved in the spectacle of giving evidence behind screens or of producing witnesses who cannot be properly cross-examined and whose antecedents are unknown.

Security Service officers have been perfectly prepared to acquire and supply intelligence to the police, who have found it extremely useful, but they have always tried to avoid giving evidence in court. The reason for that is simply that, like special branch officers, they are not very good at it. They have not been trained in the terms of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. Every detective in this country has served as a police officer and carries the same warrant card as the ordinary bobby on the beat. He is subject to the same accountability. A complaint against a police officer is dealt with in precisely the same way whether he is a member of CID or the uniformed branch. That is an enormous and important protection to the community.

In terms of efficiency and getting convictions in court, I have severe reservations about deploying officers of the Security Service. They start from a very low base. They will be on a high learning curve in taking in the rules of evidence, the rules of taking statements under judges' rules cautions and the rest. If they do not do so, defence counsel will have a field day.

Although I recognise that the Security Service may have a role in "taking in washing"—it certainly has a role in counter-proliferation—I am concerned about the balance that is being struck between civil liberties and the correct demands of the community to protection from drug dealers and organised crime.

The Security Service is a unique organisation within the British constitution. It is self-tasking. The director-general makes up his or her mind about what investigations the service should conduct. It has never in its history taken guidance from politicians about whom it should monitor and watch, whose bank account it should investigate. I believe that that is entirely right and proper. The tradition has always been that, for example, if a Member of Parliament's telephone is to be the subject of a surveillance warrant, the warrant should certainly be approved by the Prime Minister. The Security Service certainly must have the accountability that justifies its extraordinary degree of independence which is unique within the British government system.

I now turn briefly to the criminal justice system. There is a case for the Security Service to "take in washing", but an awful lot of organisations already in existence deal with the drugs problem and organised crime—Customs and Excise, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Secret Intelligence Service and GCHQ, to name but a few. They have skill in surveillance and have developed technology of clandestine monitoring. If one intends to add money to the activity, why not give it directly to those organisations instead of to the Security Service?

The Security Service may have a role to play, but I submit that we must be very careful when we balance these issues. In recent months, we have seen some worrying cases. Brian Nelson in Northern Ireland, who was an intelligence source, is now serving a long prison sentence even though his handler described him as the bravest man he had ever met and said that he was responsible for saving many lives.

Let us consider, as Lord Justice Scott is doing, the case of Paul Henderson and Paul Grecian, suppliers of intelligence to both the SIS and MI5. When they attempted to protest their innocence, they were the subject of public interest immunity certificates which looked likely at one stage to deny them their principal defence that they had been working in league with the security agencies.

Mr. Stephen: My hon. Friend will be aware that a public interest immunity certificate does not exclude

evidence from proceedings but simply places the matter before the judge, who decides whether the evidence in question is admissible.

Mr. Allason: I only wish that that were the case. I am confident that after the Matrix Churchill report comes out, it will be, but I remind my hon. Friend that a Minister had severe reservations about signing one of the certificates in that case and asked that those reservations be passed on to the judge. They were not passed on. The prosecuting counsel subsequently expressed his dismay at not even knowing that a Minister had had severe reservations.

I recognise that the public interest immunity certificate is a useful tool for the protection of informants, the Security Service, the police, the authorities in Northern Ireland and the Inland Revenue and they have often been usefully deployed, but there are cases in which people have had their defence inhibited by the use of the certificates and they have felt that they have had a raw deal. There are several cases, which I will not go into now, in which defendants have been convicted. Instead of accepting their conviction and doing their bird, the fact that a secret arm of government has interfered in the investigation or the prosecution leaves a nasty taste in the mouth.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater said, several concerns must be dealt with before the Bill can go any further. The tasking, command, integration and accountability of the Security Service have all been raised by my right hon. Friend. I have heard little from the Government today to answer any of those concerns, but I hope that when the Minister of State, Home Office—my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean)—replies to the debate he will be able to respond to them.

I also hope that my right hon. Friend will agree to disclose some of the agreements that he mentioned on the radio this morning with the National Criminal Intelligence Service and the police. As far as I know, they have never been disclosed. They are not in the Library. If the House is to give a fair wind to the Bill, the integration that has been described should be disclosed to the House so that we can satisfy ourselves that the balance between the protection of the community and the protection of defendants accused of serious crimes is absolutely right. If we get it wrong, we will not have another bite at this particular cherry. Therefore, I urge caution on the House. By all means send the Bill up into Committee. I hope that the Committee will scrutinise the legislation line by line. If we do not, we may well live to regret it.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. Before I call the next Member, let me say that one Opposition Member took much more than 30 minutes and a Conservative Back-Bencher took a great deal more than 30 minutes. There is a great deal of interest in the Bill. I cannot impose a 10-minute limit, but I appeal to hon. Members to behave in such a way that I am able to call them all.

6.58 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): There is undoubtedly more agreement between the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) and me tonight than there was when he opposed my ten-minute Bill on trade union rights at GCHQ which I introduced on 25 January 1994, the 10th anniversary of the ban. I do not criticise the hon. Gentleman for opposing me because as a result of his opposition we won the vote, for what that is worth.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Committee proceedings on the Bill. I hope that I am not hopelessly destroying his chances of being chosen to serve on the Committee when I say that I trust that he will be one of the Conservative members of the Committee. I have no hesitation in saying that, because the last time that we discussed security matters the hon. Gentleman was not chosen and I for one genuinely regretted that fact—I am sure that I was not the only Labour Member to do so. He undoubtedly had an input to make and could not do so because he was not chosen.

I am not necessarily opposed to the measure, although I certainly have a number of reservations and doubts about it, as do many hon. Members, not least on the grounds of accountability. During debates on the intelligence services, I have often said that, even if the curse of terrorism were absent—for 25 years it was far from absent when the IRA and other paramilitaries conducted their terrorist operations—there would undoubtedly be justification for an organisation such as MI5, or whatever it would tend to be called. I am not aware of any democracy, let alone dictatorship, that does not have some form of security organisation. It would be very odd if a democracy did not give itself such protection.

I hope that my use of the past tense will be justified, but I was critical of the way in which MI5 gave the impression that too many of its officials were not merely right wing—they have as much right to be right wing as left wing—but very right wing indeed. Frankly, although employed by an organisation whose task, first and foremost, is the defence of parliamentary democracy, I would question whether those officials—I trust that they were a small minority—had any real confidence in parliamentary democracy. I do not want to keep on about Peter Wright, but he is as good an example as any of someone whom I would certainly not accept had any strong feelings about parliamentary democracy—certainly not the sort of feelings that we have.

As for the present, I hope that those way-out elements are absent from the organisation with which we are dealing tonight. If I had to hazard a guess, I would say that there are far more Conservative voters among the senior ranks in MI5 and MI6 than non-Conservative voters and I have long held that view, but their politics are certainly a matter for themselves.

I accept that it might be useful for MI5 to help in the detection and prevention of serious crime. Like a number of my hon. Friends, including my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), I believe that it is important for the description "serious crime" to be more tightly drawn and I hope that the Minister will accept that. I am sure that it will be necessary for a number of amendments to be tabled in Committee—some probing and some not—because of those two words.

The Home Secretary might be right to argue that MI5 can deal more effectively with such criminality as he described on occasions than the police acting on their own. I do not underestimate the difficulties and dangers of criminality, certainly as far as the organised drug trade is concerned and because so many young people are involved in drugs and other problems that can endanger their lives. Of course, those are serious problems, but is it really necessary for MI5

[Mr. David Winnick]

to come in on the act? Would it not be more appropriate for the police to act on their own or with other law enforcement agencies as they do at present?

The fact that problems would arise during court cases has been mentioned. Security Service personnel can give evidence in court on an anonymous basis. Will it be possible for such officers to be cross-examined on their evidence? The position of the police is well regulated by the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984—a necessary Act, which laid down clearly the ways in which the police had to act as regards powers of stop and search, entry and seizure, arrest and detention. Moreover, their powers are detailed in the codes of practice through which the Act operates, which all adds up to some control and accountability—control and accountability to which MI5 will not be subject.

The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 also established the Police Complaints Authority. How much more controversial would controversial cases be—the police have been involved in such cases, for example with the Birmingham Six, the Guildford Four and so forth—if MI5 played a role, especially if they were criminal and not simply terrorist cases? We must be very careful and clear. That is why the Committee stage is of such importance with a measure of this type. The wording will have to be more tightly drawn. We do not want to get ourselves into a situation that we will later regret.

Will the Security Service be able to take action to deal with serious crime when it has not been requested to do so by the police and other enforcement agencies? What are the views of the police in the matter? That question has been very much in our minds and has been touched on in the debate. For all that I know, the police may be very enthusiastic and may have been pressing the Home Secretary to give the security services such powers. There are rumours, on the other hand, that the police are not altogether happy, but have not gone public. We are entitled to know their position and, in particular, that of the Metropolitan police. Do they believe that they will be substantially assisted by the security services? Surely we do not want sharp rivalry between the police force and the Security Service. That would not be desirable and nor would it do much to deal with serious crime.

Perhaps the Minister will tell us whether it will be possible for MI5 to carry out such activities, where it believes that that is necessary, without the police being notified—acting on its own, without the sort of co-ordination that would exist in most cases, I assume, between the police and the security services.

Those are the sort of questions that we need to probe in Committee and on Report. I will not vote against the Bill tonight, but while I accept that there might be a case for MI5 having those additional powers, because of all my doubts and reservations I am clear in my mind that the case for proper parliamentary accountability and scrutiny of MI5 is strengthened. I have long argued that case. It is not some issue that I have taken up recently, as I argued it in the 1980s and before. I argued that, as in other democracies in the western world, such as the United States, Germany and the Scandinavian countries, MI5 should receive some parliamentary scrutiny.

I accept that the Government have taken a modest step in that direction—I was a member of the Standing Committee on the appropriate Bill—by setting up the Intelligence and Security Committee, but it does not satisfy the need for proper parliamentary accountability.

When the likes of myself, my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) and the rest have raised the issue in the past, the Government's response was clear. They said that such accountability was not necessary and that the security services were subject to ministerial control. They said that we had no justification for raising such issues. Although it was not said openly, they hinted that we were just causing trouble. It is interesting to note that, although that was the argument many years ago, it was not quite the argument when the Government conceded that there was a case for some scrutiny—hence the reason for setting up the Intelligence and Security Committee. The Government have accepted, albeit to a limited extent, the need for Parliament or, at least, parliamentarians to look into the work of the security services.

I have never argued that proper parliamentary scrutiny should necessarily operate in exactly the same way as the work of other Select Committees. I do not suggest for a moment that the Select Committee should investigate future operations, or should necessarily investigate those that have already taken place. I do, however, believe that there is a case for parliamentary scrutiny that does not currently exist.

Hon. Members may ask what is wrong with the existing Committee. For one thing, it does not report to Parliament. Unlike other Select Committees, it is not accountable to the House of Commons; it is accountable to the Prime Minister, to whom it reports annually. The Prime Minister decides whether the report, or part of it, should be deleted: he judges whether the report should be submitted to the House in its current form, or in a different form. I do not consider that to be parliamentary scrutiny as such.

Moreover, the Committee does not sit in a parliamentary building. I do not understand that. Other Committees sit upstairs in private, and in many instances—with perfect justification—a policeman is present, either outside or inside the room.

Mr. Stephen: Has the hon. Gentleman not heard of the sophisticated eavesdropping devices that exist nowadays?

Mr. Winnick: That would have to be dealt with by the House of Commons authorities. But given that the Committee sits in the Cabinet Office, how do we know that such modern techniques do not operate there? How do we know that they do not operate in the Cabinet? In fact, we are not particularly worried about that, as we receive pretty full reports of what happens in Cabinet meetings in any event.

Moreover, the Committee is not serviced by any of the Clerks of the House. I understand that, before a clerk is appointed, the application is scrutinised by the security services. That may be justified. The fact remains, however, that this Committee is serviced by the Cabinet Office, and that in itself constitutes an insult to the House of Commons.

I shall continue to press the case for parliamentary accountability and scrutiny of the security services. I am sure that I shall not be alone in the parliamentary Labour party in so doing. Furthermore, I find it difficult to believe that, when we are allowed the scrutiny that I have long

advocated, many hon. Members—even Conservative Members—will suggest that it should be abandoned. We must try to function in this respect as a mature democracy, as other countries have. I feel that the Bill is deficient in that important respect, among others.

7.13 pm

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): I am no expert on the security services, and I suspect that the same applies to most other hon. Members; but I recognise an expert when I see one. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason), whose speech—although somewhat overlong—displayed rare balance and expertise. If parliamentary scrutiny is to mean anything, there is every reason for my hon. Friend to play a prominent and vociferous part as a member of the Standing Committee.

Despite my lack of expertise, I can say two things. First, the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) spoke of the greater openness that now prevails. That is illustrated by the fact that, 10 years ago, we probably would not have been debating the security services in the Chamber. Indeed, I understand that the Government did not even publicly recognise their existence. The hon. Member for Walsall, North may have reservations about whether the Select Committee should report to the Prime Minister rather than the House, but I feel that the advances made in 1989, when the security services were put on a statutory footing, and in 1994, when parliamentary oversight was improved, represent real developments in the accountability of the services—as is appropriate in a healthy democratic system. Along with others, I pay tribute to the work of Stella Rimington, the present director-general.

Secondly, I welcome any legislative or, indeed, other action to combat the curse of serious crime. I profoundly agreed with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary when he spoke of the large and growing menace of organised crime. While I may not be an expert on the security services, I believe that we are probably all near-experts on the appalling damage that such crime can do to our constituents. There is the carnage caused by drugs; there are immigration rackets, which are bad not only for race relations but for those who are duped by such organised crime when they come to this country. Currency scams undermine our economic structure. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) described Madras as the counterfeit currency capital of the world, and I am sure that what can be done with British visas can also be done with British currency. Organised crime can have appalling effects, especially in an increasingly technological age.

Like other hon. Members, I recognise that intelligence is crucial to the combating of organised crime. Along with Stella Rimington, whose 1994 Dimbleby lecture has already been mentioned, I appreciate that the reduction in resources devoted by the security services to espionage—and, happily and, we hope, permanently, the reduction in resources to combat terrorism following the ceasefires in Northern Ireland over the past year and a half—mean that more resources and expertise can be diverted to support law and order. That is why I consider it sensible to amend the 1989 Act to widen the remit of the security services beyond the combating of espionage, terrorism and sabotage and the safeguarding of economic well-being—although, as I have said, it could be argued that the services now have a legitimate interest in the prevention and detection of organised crime, as that endangers our economic well-being.

I also support clause 2, which would amend the Intelligence Services Act 1994, giving the Security Service an opportunity to apply for warrants to investigate crime in a domestic context. It seems curious that other services are allowed to apply for warrants but not on a domestic scale. If we want to operate effectively against organised and other crime, our security services must be able to operate in the country of origin.

I recognise the importance of co-ordinating our activities against the monster of organised crime. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater said that there were £500 million worth of drugs seizures last year, £176 million of which were made by regional crime squads. That is a drop in the ocean given the total trade in drugs, so it is important to co-ordinate organisations such as the National Criminal Intelligence Service and encourage further co-ordination through the national crime squad, once it is up and running, and the Home Office directorate of organised and international crime. My only reservation is that we should not think that a vast army will go into battle against organised crime. I understand from the Library's briefing that the Security Service's total resources are only £150 million a year and the number of staff employed in the general intelligence group is just 340. As those are not all operatives and only a proportion of them will be able to take up their new responsibilities, we should not expect miracles from them in a short time, even on a laundering or, as my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay said, "washing" basis.

Although I agree with the principles of the Bill, I understand the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Walsall, North and those hon. Members who have tabled an amendment tonight about civil freedoms. It would be ironic if a democracy set up a service to protect itself but put in place a system that oppressed its people. As vice-chairman of the parliamentary human rights group, I do not want some of the abuses that exist in other countries, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater documented, mistakenly imported into the United Kingdom.

The two important issues are, first, accountability of the security services and, secondly, their relationship with the law enforcement agencies. I, too, am concerned about the relatively loose definition of "serious crime". Clause 2(3B) mentions "violence" and "substantial financial gain", but "substantial" is not an exact word. It also says:

"a large number of persons in pursuit of a common purpose",

which can be interpreted as widely or narrowly as one would want. Although we want to give the intelligence services the maximum range possible to help them fight organised crime, we must tighten up that definition in Standing Committee.

The present system of accountability, with two tribunals for the security services and two commissioners, works well. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay, I am slightly worried that definitive figures—somebody mentioned 54—for the number of complaints made against the security services are not released. The Home Office should see whether a more open regime could be introduced.

[Mr. Anthony Coombs]

Like other hon. Members, I should like the protections which the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 at present provides to the public to apply to intelligence officers who are called on to give evidence in Crown courts in cases of organised crime. That matter has not been carefully thought through. I understand that this is a framework document that does not deal with detail, but unless the detail is adequately scrutinised and assurances are given in Standing Committee, the potential for abuse will remain.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) mentioned the relationship between the secret services and the law and order forces. It is inevitable that their paths will cross. The same trends that drive international terrorism in terms of technology and speedier travel drive international crime. We heard how the two intermingle in many parts of the world, including Britain. The security services used to have primacy over the police, but where crime and terrorism are virtually synonymous, it may be difficult to establish lines of accountability between the police and the security services, especially, as the Intelligence and Security Committee said, given that the security services are "self-tasking" and set their own priorities. The Committee took up that matter in its latest report and said:

> "In so far as the Service is to be given a new role in countering 'conventional' criminal activity, the legislation needs to make very clear that it will be working *in support of* the law enforcement organisations. Accountability of issues will also need to be resolved, as will the differing systems under which authorisation is given for the interception of communications and for the entry on, or interference with, property."

I happen to agree with what Lord Cuckney said in the House of Lords on Second Reading of the Bill. He said that, although those problems look mountainous and sinister now, they will pale into proportion once the police and security services can work together to combat organised crime. He said that their different functions will prove complementary in their approach to common problems. Although I agree that that will happen, we cannot take it for granted; hence the reservations that I have expressed.

I welcome the Bill, which will help us to advance in our fight against the menace of organised crime.

7.27 pm

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): Like the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason), I pay tribute to the Security Service, not because I have an intimate knowledge of its operations, but because the freer and more open a society becomes the more susceptible it is to subversive activity and terrorism, so one needs the protection of such a service. On one of the media channels this morning, somebody said that we do not really need such organisations. That is absurd.

I want, in a short speech, to discuss accountability and the relative powers of the police and other law enforcement agencies. With the collapse of the eastern bloc and communism, and the prolonged peace in Northern Ireland, many skilled people in the Security Service must either be made redundant or be redeployed. It is as simple as that.

We have, however, had the rising threat of international drug trafficking and organised crime, which are areas on which the spare capacity might be refocused. Such areas of operation might seem ripe for harvesting, but concerns have been expressed by organisations such as the Association of Chief Police Officers. The notion of imposing new national structures on what is essentially local policing is found to be unacceptable. National co-ordination is viewed as acceptable by many senior police officers, but national operational units are not.

A balance has to be struck between the benefits of a coherent response to cross-border organised crime and the dangers of creating a readily available key to the control of the whole of the nation's police. For that reason, my local police force and its excellent chief constable, Tony Leonard, oppose the notion of any operational override of local policing via the head of the NCIS, given that that postholder answers directly to the national political office of Home Secretary. Likewise, I have always felt that any central role that draws together the activity of the regional crime squads should be one of co-ordination only and not an executive operation.

Concerns have also been expressed about the implications of the direct reporting by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis to the Home Secretary.

I recognise the skills and experience of the Security Service and readily acknowledge its excellence in counter-subversion and counter-espionage, but I am concerned about the narrowness of its abilities in comparison with the broader community-oriented and community-developed skills of local police forces. The narrowness is less important when the Security Service is engaged in its covert roles, but it will become a significant hindrance when its personnel are directed towards more general, mainstream police operations.

I am also concerned about the incomplete accountability of members of the Security Service, which the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) spoke about at some length. Members of the Security Service are not yet—quite understandably—touched by the ethos of public openness that police forces experience. Although there are some mechanisms in place to call the Security Service to account, I see little practical change. The culture of accountability has not manifested itself in the willingness of the Security Service to offer its structure, policies and accounting to public scrutiny, or in any of its members making themselves accessible to public debate, despite the efforts of the retiring director, Stella Rimington. The culture of accountability is much more widespread and pronounced in the police service.

I am also concerned that operatives within the Security Service, because of their necessary secrecy and because evidence gathering has been subordinate to intelligence gathering, will be inexperienced in many aspects of court procedure. That is not an insuperable problem, but there must be a substantial shift in cultural thinking as well as in attitudes to equality of opportunity and open management.

Substantial skills are vested in the Security Service and it has considerable resources—the equivalent of 12 senior investigating officers, some 200 surveillance operatives and about 2,000 staff in total. That is not insignificant. There is evidence that the Security Service is already positioning itself for its new role with preparatory structures. Moves are being made.

My wish is that the general public will be able to benefit from the talents of the Security Service in the wider fight against serious crime, in co-operation with local police. Together, they would offer the maximum threat to serious and organised crime. However, any such benefits must arise from a solution that meets the shorter-term aim of the need to fight and beat serious cross-border organised crime and which avoids jeopardising people's long-term liberty in other directions.

We need to take certain positions on the question of cross-border crime which should embrace the following broad policy elements. First, the House should recognise that a national and coherent response to serious, organised crime is necessary. Secondly, the active use of Security Service skills is desirable. Thirdly, we need to minimise the constitutional risk—and the link between the political position of Home Secretary and the National Criminal Intelligence Service should be severed. Fourthly, the historical link between the Home Secretary and the Metropolitan police should also be severed to reduce the constitutional risk further.

I make those points because, even if we do not amend the Bill in Committee, it will be useful to stimulate debate and to have statements from Ministers. Those points are important to the police service and many other people working in the crime agencies. Fifthly, the head of the NCIS, if permitted or encouraged to assume a direct operational role as opposed to a mere co-ordinating function, should be allowed to do so under a well-defined and tightly controlled remit. Finally, if the national co-ordinator of the regional crime squad is to have a direct operational role—in the NCIS or separately—the accountability structure should mirror the tripartite system.

So how do we achieve those aims? We need legislation to clarify the position of the Security Service and its accountability for its planning, resource management and actions. The Bill fails to do that, and the Committee stage will be an opportunity to amend it. Amendments will be needed to redefine the role and scope of the post of head of the NCIS, if the postholder were to assume authority for direct operations.

The provisions of the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994 should be left undisturbed, as they define the Home Secretary's constitutional position vis-à-vis local police authorities and chief constables.

The head of the NCIS must be a police officer whose career has developed through accountability to local communities, so that he or she is sensitive to local needs and so that decision making in conjunction with local commanders works well. We need to have a very clear structure for the accountability of the head of the NCIS. He or she must be a person of such seniority of rank and experience that he or she commands authority and credibility in the management of a country-wide police operation. However, that person must be subordinate to locally appointed chief constables on matters of resources and delegated control. I also believe that the board of management must have the power to appoint and remove the head of the NCIS and that having CID experience is important. Deployment of Security Service personnel must be carefully defined. Many of those matters have not been scrutinised today, but I hope that they will be considered in Committee.

The Bill is important. It is a short Bill—it has only two main clauses—but it is revolutionary in terms of our structures. If we use the Security Service in the way set out in the Bill, there will be an impact on all the other enforcement agencies. The relationship between those agencies is not defined in the Bill. I very much hope that there will be a full debate on the matter because we are dealing with the interaction of powers, the scope of powers and accountability. That is as important as the direct accountability of the Security Service; that point has not been made today.

The principle of the Bill is right and I agree with the many hon. Members who have said that. However, there are gaping holes in it and in people's understanding of the ramifications of what will emerge from the relationship of the police with the other agencies.

7.40 pm

Mr. David Ashby (North-West Leicestershire): I promise to speak for only 10 minutes, Madam Speaker. Even if I am halfway through my speech at 7.51 pm, I shall sit down. I shall keep that promise; I am most grateful that you have called me.

This has been a fascinating debate. We have heard a great deal about things that we have never heard about before. I had a friend whom I always suspected was in the Security Service. If I could only have talked to him—he is now dead—about all the washing, laundry and ironing that he had to do, I might have been able to have a rapport with him.

We have heard it all from the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason). We now know that we are talking about one great big launderette in which half the machines are being used and half are not. The ones that are not being used are super-duper—the very latest model of washing machine. They are there to be used and I agree that we should not leave machinery lying idle.

The only problem is that, next door, there is an absolutely super, much bigger, launderette which is able to take laundry from all over the country and to wash it. It does not do the ironing, but it does do the cleaning and it delivers the laundry to others who do the ironing at the operative end. That launderette is the National Criminal Intelligence Service. We have two launderettes, one better than the other because it has super machinery.

The NCIS has one other thing—a dry cleaning service—because it operates overseas and gets information from other information-gathering organisations in Europe. It has that advantage. We now have to consider how we can place the half-used launderette alongside all the other launderettes and how we can get all the machines operating together. That will be the work of the Committee.

We must remember one thing. We shall have no success with the NCIS unless we leave it as an information-gathering organisation; it simply cannot be an operational arm. It would resist time and again any suggestion that it should have an operational arm and it has good reasons for holding that view. When one talks to similar organisations in other countries, as I have, one finds that they all say the same thing. They say, "We have to be information gatherers; we must not have an operational arm. We have to gather the information and let it out to others." We have had similar discussions about similar information-gathering arms, such as the Government communications headquarters.

[Mr. David Ashby]

We have also had talk about the interception of communications. I am not allowed to talk about that because the Interception of Communications Act 1985 says that one cannot say whether the interception of communications happens but, with a nod and a wink, it works extremely well because it is concerned with information gathering. Anyone who has had any contact with anything to do with the interception of communications knows how effective it is as a result of being information gathering. We have to be careful on this point.

I shall not repeat the speeches that have been made by others—I am watching the clock—because I agree with virtually everything that everyone has said. We shall have to be careful about the relationship between the agencies. We must think about the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and we must think about other codes of conduct.

I do not agree entirely with the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers), who went on a great deal about a balancing act. I am sure that new Labour does not believe that liberty and justice are balancing acts. One is not half guilty or half innocent; one is either guilty or innocent and there is no halfway measure. There is no halfway measure about human rights and there is no halfway measure about the right and wrong procedures or about what is oppressive and what is not. Those are absolutes and I do not believe that any balancing act is involved.

The House has misunderstood the reasons why some of the Bill's provisions are vague. They have to remain vague. We have been talking about organised crime. When it comes to court, it is just a crime. It may be the importation of a large amount of cannabis or heroin, but it is a crime and not a series of crimes. If there is a series of crimes, there is a series of different charges; it has to be that way.

When we talk about serious crime, we cannot talk about a figure or a limit. We may be talking about the importation of only £100-worth of heroin, which is the subject of the charge. However, in dealing with the case and in sentencing, the judge will know that importation is part of an action by a large section of organised crime and he will sentence accordingly, even though the case involves only £100 or £1,000-worth of heroin. We cannot really put limits on or try to define too much what we intend to do. If we do, we shall spoil what we want to achieve.

Organised crime is a term that we can use, but it is not a term that lawyers will be able to use. We all understand, however, what organised crime is. In the Home Affairs Committee, we have taken evidence and we understand some of the threats to this country from those who have organised crime in other countries and who wish to organise crime here. We are fortunate in that we have not had a great intrusion, although intrusion there is, but we must realise that it will come and we have to be prepared for it.

One area in which the Security Service will be able to help tremendously will be in investigating, alerting us to and finding out more about the threat from beyond our shores. It will have a role in looking at that threat in eastern European countries and in Russia, where the greatest threat is to be found. That organised crime has already penetrated other countries, such as America.

Somebody said earlier that the white slave trade does not exist any more; I can tell the House that it does. It exists in southern Spain, where all the prostitutes come from eastern Europe and are organised from eastern Europe. They are well organised in Spain, where there has been penetration of prostitution. I call that organised crime, and it is the sort of thing that we have to keep from our own shores.

Much of what has to be said has been said. We shall have to look carefully at the Bill to ensure that we are not throwing out the baby of traditional justice and liberty with the bath water. We must remember that we have a wonderful society here today and that we want to keep it like that. That is why we have to fight crime and why we must ensure that our standards remain the same. I support the Bill.

7.49 pm

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South-East): I shall not take long, because I know that many hon. Members want to speak and it is not pleasant to sit for a long time and not be called to speak.

I agree with those who urge caution in relation to the Bill. It is easy to be carried away regarding actions that we might want to take to fight crime. I should prefer to wait until about the time of Third Reading, when we shall be in a better position to judge, having read what emerges from Committee—which amendments are accepted and which rejected—before deciding irrevocably whether to accept the Bill. That leaves the question open, but I am one of those who would prefer to err on the side of caution than go over the top and live to regret it, as many people have done.

We cannot tackle crime in isolation. We must be tough on crime in the measures that we take, but other additional measures need to be taken, especially regarding inner cities. There is the issue of unemployment. I shall not digress, but one cannot fight crime with the Bill in isolation from the other problems that exist in the inner cities, where people are driven into crime, for a variety of reasons, to make money because they cannot make money legitimately. We must tackle those issues in addition to fighting organised crime.

Like the hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire (Mr. Ashby) and several others, I am a member of the Home Affairs Select Committee. We visited three countries and considered the various facets of organised crime. During those visits, we met some very senior police officers and Ministry officials and discussed a range of issues from wide-ranging matters such as organised crime to more specific matters, such as identity cards, and sought out opinions.

The Home Affairs Committee's recommendation should not be seized on by the Home Secretary as a way to legitimise the use of intelligence services to fight crime. That report stands on its own. We have not had much time to discuss and consider the Home Secretary's response to the report. Many hon. Members may believe that, because they have heard other hon. Members say that they have read the Home Affairs Select Committee's report and the Home Secretary's response, that is a good recommendation to support the Bill. I prefer to read what the Home Secretary said about the Home Affairs Committee's report before I make a final decision.

One must use several measures, not only the Bill, to fight organised crime. The funny thing about some of the information that we have about organised crime is that there does not appear at any stage to be a Mr. Big who may be targeted in this country. We know that there are organisations such as the Mafia and the Russian mafia abroad, which can be very elusive. People should bear that in mind. If the Home Secretary and his colleagues feel that the Bill will tackle organised crime with major success, I would urge caution, based on evidence from abroad. The organisers of organised crime are very elusive indeed. The Mafia certainly are. We know about other organisations such as the tongs and triads. One finds oneself in a very difficult maze when one tries to tackle those organisations.

The Home Secretary is taking considerable powers on himself, because at the moment the Asylum and Immigration Bill is passing through the House of Commons. About two years ago, the Home Secretary took some additional powers on himself when he produced the Police and Magistrates' Courts Bill. One wonders whether, with those two Bills, the Home Secretary has taken into consideration the issue of the safeguarding of civil rights in the fight against crime.

We should seriously question why one person, the Home Secretary, under the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994, can totally change the police policy of a given area, for example the west midlands. Powers are being given to the Home Secretary, which we must scrutinise carefully. He can, in certain ways, direct the intelligence services. We must ensure that the Home Secretary's powers are limited and that it is the police who control, for the purposes of fighting crime, the operations of the intelligence services, not the other way round.

We should think very deeply about those measures because they might, if not handled properly, have profound constitutional implications for the country. I am not one of those who would like a British Federal Bureau of Investigation, because the FBI's overall record is questionable. We must be extremely worried about civil rights and citizens' rights. We must also think very deeply about the way in which the police and the intelligence services work together and have control.

I was interested in the Home Secretary's opening statement, in which he referred to the fight against bullets and knives. If he was so worried about fighting the possession of knives and the issue of people being able to acquire knives, why has he taken about 18 months to act? Now he is using knives as a justification for using the intelligence services when he might pass an Act to deal with knives, instead of leaving that to a private Member's Bill some time this month.

Some of the knives that one sees, which can be sold to 12 and 14-year-old children without any control, are horrendous, to say the least. Many people experience that in the inner cities. We want to fight, not only against the bullet, but against knives and against other causes of crime.

I shall not repeat what honourable colleagues have said, much of which I agree with. I urge the House to approach the Bill very cautiously indeed.

7.56 pm

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): For the past 30 years, the attitude of the British criminal justice system towards criminals has been one of resigned toleration. Fortunately, we now have a Government, and especially a Home Secretary, who realise the terrible danger that criminals pose to our society and are determined to take the necessary measures to combat them.

The Home Secretary's Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 has given the police much wider powers to combat criminals than they had previously. My Bail (Amendment) Act 1993 has helped in dealing with bail bandits. However, organised crime today is reaching horrendous proportions and if we do not deal with it very firmly and quickly, we shall find ourselves in the dreadful position that pertains in some north and south American cities.

Of organised criminals, perhaps drug dealers are the worst. They are ruthless, they will stop at nothing, they use firearms and they present a very dangerous threat, even here in our own capital city. Organised crime includes counterfeiting. An especially dangerous form of organised crime is immigration racketeering, whereby unsuspecting people are brought to the United Kingdom from other countries by racketeers and end up in virtual slavery to those racketeers. I am very glad that the Home Secretary is taking measures under the Asylum and Immigration Bill to tackle them.

The Prime Minister is right to say that today, after the end of the cold war, the children of Britain are in greater danger from drug dealers than they are from a nuclear missile.

In the war against organised crime, intelligence is vital. My hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) took a very long time trying to persuade us that perhaps the intelligence services have no role to play in that, but I was not persuaded. I do not mind whether the security services are seeking a role. The fact is that they have skills, expertise and information that are vital in the fight against crime, and we should be very foolish indeed not to use them.

Mr. Rogers: I disagree with the hon. Gentleman about the security services looking for a role. They have been co-operating with all the law enforcement agencies for a number of years. My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) asked about the police view of all this. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that prominent policemen have suggested using the intelligence gathering expertise of the security services.

Mr. Stephen: I entirely agree with everything that the hon. Gentleman says. I was expressing my disagreement with other hon. Members who have said that the reason for this Bill may be that the security services are seeking a role. I do not think that they are; and whether they are or not is immaterial.

Let us not suppose that the conventional threats from which the security services have protected us over the past 40 years have gone away entirely—they are more likely to be in suspended animation. We would be foolish indeed to dismantle a system that has protected us well from those threats for many years.

I must take issue with my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay on his point about public interest immunity certificates. It matters not whether the Minister who signs a certificate does so willingly or reluctantly. The important factor is that he signs it. That action puts before the judge the sensitive evidence that is the subject of the

[Mr. Stephen]

certificate. It is therefore not a gagging certificate in any sense of the word. It enables the judge to see the evidence and decide for himself whether it should be admitted.

Many of our constituents may wonder why the Bill is necessary. They may always have thought that the security services help the police combat organised crime, and they may be surprised to learn that they have been legally prohibited from doing so. The Bill is necessary to remove that restriction, which is why I fully support it.

Of course, when gathering the information that they will need, the security services will need warrants to enter properties in the United Kingdom; but that right is limited by clause 2. The security services commissioner is already in place, and it is his duty to review the use of warrants by the security services.

The role of the police is vital, and the Government do not suggest that the security services should supplant that role in any way. Clause 1(1) states that the function of the service is to act

"in support of the prevention and detection of serious crime".

One might have expected to read "in support of the police", but it is clear in any case that the role is a supportive, not a principal one.

The evidence collected by the security services may have to be put before a court, but the chief role of the security services will be to assist the police to discover evidence, not to give evidence in court themselves. It is more likely to be a police officer who has been put on to the evidence by the security services who will give it in court—not an employee of the security services. If it should become necessary for such an employee to give evidence, however, then arrangements can be made in suitable cases, just as they have been made in the past for serving SAS personnel, so as to ensure that security is not compromised. There is also a security services tribunal in which complaints against the service can be heard and determined.

The gathering and use of information is already restricted by section 2(2) of the Security Service Act 1989, which makes it clear that the director-general is under a duty to ensure that

"there are arrangements for securing that no information is obtained by the Service except so far as necessary for the proper discharge of its functions or disclosed by it except so far as necessary for that purpose or for the purpose of preventing or detecting serious crime"

or for the purpose of criminal proceedings. The director-general is also required to ensure that the service

"does not take any action to further the interests of any political party."

All hon. Members are concerned about civil rights, but we are also concerned about the protection of the public. I do not agree with my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (Mr. Ashby) that there can be any absolutes in these matters. It is always a question of balancing the civil rights of the individual against the protection of the public. In a free and democratic society, we must all surrender some of our rights for the common good. I am quite confident that the Government have got the balance right in the Bill.

An additional safeguard comes in the form of the external staff counsellor, to whom any member of the security services can [illegible] if he or she has doubts about the work that they are instructed to do. Moreover, we have the parliamentary Committee which oversees the expenditure, administration and policy of the Security Service. Its members are senior parliamentarians whose judgment and integrity we can all trust. I do not think it desirable that the sensitive information which comes to their attention should be available to Parliament generally—I am sure that they can be relied on.

The Bill does not propose to give the Security Service any additional powers; it merely allows it to operate in a new area. Like many other hon. Members, I have my doubts about the definition to be found in lines nine to 12 of the Bill. It is too vague. Although we do not want to restrict the Security Service in its fight against organised crime, we do not want it to have the power to deal with wholly inappropriate cases either. As a matter of practice, I think it unlikely that it would, and, if it did, the Home Secretary would face considerable criticism at the Dispatch Box. I ask the Minister to think again and, if he can, to come up with a tighter definition in Committee, and one that will satisfy the concerns expressed by hon. Members on both sides today.

It is important to note that the Security Service has no executive powers. It is not a police force, so I imagine that it will be up to the service to ask the police to execute any warrant that it may wish to use.

Local police forces are an important part of our constitution—the system whereby power has been dispersed around the country. I would not want that reversed, but crime is not local; organised crime can be national or even international. The regional crime squads have certainly been effective. In 1994-95 they recovered £176 million-worth of drugs and £36 million-worth of counterfeit money. I am also glad that the national crime squad that the Prime Minister has proposed is taking shape, and I hope it will come into operation soon. We cannot fight organised criminals without a proper national crime squad. Whether such a squad is desirable is a matter for this House. We can take the advice of police officers and other experts, but it is for us and no one else to decide whether this country should have a national crime squad.

The investigation of crime should be co-ordinated, but it is also important to co-ordinate the prosecution of crime. There are many prosecuting agencies, including the Crown Prosecution Service, the Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise and the Department of Trade and Industry. In recent cases, it has been found that the left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing has caused enormous trouble for individuals and for the Government. I hope in future that the Attorney-General's office will have a much more effective liaison and co-ordinating role in the prosecution of crime.

It is no good catching criminals unless one is prepared to deal firmly with them. I welcome the recent introduction of much longer, extended sentences for persons who have been convicted of serious or persistent crime. Once the persons have been convicted and sentenced, it is necessary that they are dealt with much more firmly in prison.

I do not subscribe to the view that people go to prison just as punishment. They go to prison for punishment as well. The House must send out a message loud and clear to drug barons who will use even murder for their purposes that anyone who deliberately takes another

person's life should know, before he pulls the knife or the trigger, that he will go to prison for the rest of his natural life.

8.10 pm

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): To borrow a phrase from earlier, I was not sure whether, in his hearty felicitation to Stella Rimington, my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) was advancing a sort of probing amendment, or whether it represented the Front-Bench team's position. In any event, I am not alone in the parliamentary Labour party's ranks. As the author of an early-day motion calling for Mrs. Rimington to be sacked from her job, which obtained the support of more than 50 of my fellow Labour Members, it would be a little foolish of me to join in the Front-Bench spokesman's congratulations on her retirement.

I am sure that those congratulations were sincere, but they were misguided. My good as well as honourable Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) lived through the same period as me. As an activist, I will never forget the role played by Stella Rimington as head of F branch of MI5 in subverting and sabotaging the National Union of Mineworkers' legal withdrawal of labour, when the enemy within was identified by the security services, almost certainly—contradicting a point made earlier—under the direction of the political leadership of the day, and when all sorts of atrocious abuses of miners' liberty took place. People who toiled in the bowels of the earth to produce wealth for this country had their democratic rights and liberties systematically subverted by MI5 under Stella Rimington's direction. In those circumstances, it is no less than a monstrosity for us to offer her any congratulations.

The Home Secretary was at his most emollient this evening, but frankly, he was no more persuasive in that guise than in his more usual wolfish manner. I have sat through virtually every minute of this debate, and one of the overwhelming things that has struck me is how little wholehearted support exists for this measure in the House.

Apart from the hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen), who seemed more or less wholehearted until the last few minutes of his speech, virtually everyone has stated their support in principle, before laying into the measure with a barrage of anxieties, caveats and even criticisms. That makes me wonder how it can be that this measure is to go through the House this evening without the opposition of a substantial number of people.

I make it clear that, because it is apparently my party's line, I will not vote against the measure, but I cannot be dragged into voting for it. Like others, I think that, when this measure returns for Third Reading, all of us must seriously consider whether the measure has been sufficiently amended to take care of the many anxieties that have been expressed.

An enormous red herring has been dragged through the debate from the beginning. It is that, somehow, if we do not support the measure, we are soft on organised and serious crime. As I listened to hon. Member after hon. Member accurately describe the horrendous growth and proliferation of crime, and the fear and misery that goes with it, I considered two issues.

First, who has presided over that monumental increase in the evil of crime? Who has been in office for the past 17 years, when crime has multiplied in the way that it has, and who has presided over the country's economic and social conditions, in which crime and drug-taking has bred so prolifically? Does anyone believe that the housing estates of Glasgow and of this country's other great cities, where young people are injecting deadly junk into their veins, can be separated from the despair and hopelessness that those people have experienced in that period? Does anyone think that those two matters are separate?

The second question that occurred to me was: if this problem is so gigantic, and it is, how can we begin to believe that, by transferring a few dozen or even a few hundred G-men from MI5, or a few millions or even a few tens of millions of pounds of their resources, we will make a serious dent in this problem?

I am led to this conclusion: why do not we spend extra money on our police force to tackle problems of criminality? If the people in MI5 are exceptionally skilled—everyone here seems to think they are—why do we not make them into policemen and transfer them into the civilian police, where they can operate under normal policing conditions, including normal standards of accountability?

I do not have sufficient confidence in the accountability of the Security Service willingly to go along with this proposal. I have said so before, in the debate on the Queen's Speech. I am too mindful of the times not in the distant past, when some sections of the Security Service have acted not only outwith, but against, the law, willingly to see them transferred on to our streets as a secret adjunct to the civilian police force.

The hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) made a remarkably powerful and well-informed speech, which some people have foolishly rebuked because of its length, but, frankly, there was little more to be said after that speech. He said that not all MI5 members bugged and burgled their way across London—that is true—but that some of them did; and who were they bugging and burgling? It was the elected Prime Minister, who was titularly in charge of the very Security Service that was subverting him. It was not disproved. On the contrary, it was confirmed by the head of MI5 to the late Harold Wilson that he had been bugged and burgled by a section of the security services.

I talked earlier about MI5's role in the great miners' strike of 1984-85. Only this week, I have been grappling with the scandal—of which, I assure the Minister, we have not heard the last—of a conspiracy involving captains of British industry, acting in concert with Security Service members and the Saudi Arabian Government—a dictatorship at that—to subvert the democratic liberty of a political refugee living in this country, and to plot perhaps his kidnapping and perhaps even his murder while living here, so I am sorry to break with the consensus.

I am sure that there are good men and women in MI5. There must be. One of the ridiculous aspects of this matter is the painting of the Security Service as a brigade of James Bonds. MI5 and MI6 are composed of ordinary flesh-and-blood people, some of them brilliant, some fools, some knaves and some communist spies, so let us not paint that group as a panacea for the terrible ills that we have all been describing and that we all see every day in our constituencies. It is a service of good men and bad men, good women and bad women. This evening, reference enough has been made for that to be demonstrated.

[Mr. George Galloway]

I do not believe that the Government have made a very good case. I do not know why there was no Scottish Office Minister here today. When my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) asked the blindingly brilliant question about which Secretary of State would have the right to sign warrants to set the security services loose on crime issues in our country, the Home Secretary, uncharacteristically—he is a clever man—floundered and could not answer the question. He had to seek refuge in waffle. The truth is that the Secretary of State for Scotland must be the person to sign such warrants in Scotland, or we will change the entire basis of the governance of Scotland. The Minister of State on the Front Bench is a former Whip attached to the Scottish Office, and he must know that. That question was not dealt with properly, and had not been thought of in advance.

The nub of the issue is that identified by the Intelligence and Security Committee. Who will these people take their orders from? Who will task them—to use the word that has been used today—who will they relate to, and to whom will they be accountable? The Government have not even begun to advance answers to those critical questions. They had better do so in Committee and on Third Reading if the measure is to command any intelligent and informed support.

8.21 pm

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): The speech of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) will send a chill through hon. Members on both sides of the House and many others who heard it. It shows the innate hostility that exists among too many Opposition Members—although not all of them—and the pathological hatred that still exists of those who seek to prevent the subversion of our democratic processes.

The hon. Gentleman's speech was disappointing, because he trivialised the drug problem. It is not a problem that exists solely in rundown inner-city housing estates in Scotland. It occurs throughout our country, regardless of class, background, sex or region. It is not a response to hopelessness, but an international problem which affects this country as it affects socialist and other countries throughout the world. It needs to be reacted to in that same international and co-ordinated way.

I want to start with the drugs problem. On new year's day, as many of us were celebrating the start of the new year, one young girl was fighting for her life in Peterborough district hospital. Helen Cousins, aged 19, had taken an ecstasy tablet at a new year's eve party and immediately went into a coma, showing some of the symptoms that had so tragically killed Leah Betts only a few weeks previously. Thankfully, on 3 January, she regained consciousness, but she nearly became the first victim of drug misuse in 1996. That is a fear which affects every parent of teenagers in this country. It was perhaps ironic that her regaining consciousness coincided with the receipt by many hon. Members of a video called "Sorted", which was prepared by Granada Television and circulated to every secondary school in the country with the intention of warning children of 11 and over about the danger of drugs. It is hard to imagine a more disturbing and worrying film. In the film, Leah Betts's father asks, "Why Leah?" As one watches the film, the reasons for her death become more evident.

We see one of Leah's friends saying:

"We didn't want to drink, so we took the pills."

That unwittingly vocalises a myth that is shared by so many young people and which is propagated by those involved in the organised crime behind the drugs trade that ecstasy and similar tablets are somehow a cleaner and healthier alternative to some of the temptations facing young people in our society.

Leah Betts's sister said that the drugs were known as "Doves" because of the image of the bird stencilled on the tablets. That is another disturbing motif. In the name of fashion, people are taking a designer drug in the same way as they would buy designer clothes, but it has all the connotations of peace, contentment and well-being. Again, that is an image propagated by the evil people in the drugs trade. What we see is the terrifying portrayal of the way in which organised crime is preying on young people throughout the country. As I have said, we cannot pretend that it affects only one section of our society, because it occurs throughout the country, regardless of education, sex or background.

Of course, a great deal is going on to deal with that. There are many excellent education programmes, and I am privileged to be associated with one called Life Education Centres, which takes the message to primary schools so that children of the youngest ages can be made aware of the problems of all types of addiction and related problems. However, those efforts are being undermined day after day by people who derive an immensely wealthy living from the organised crime of the drugs trade.

Although they are an integral part of the chain in the drugs industry, the problem is not just with the petty criminals or the young people who are passing on the tablets at very little profit to their schoolfriends and mates. We must be most worried about the organisers, those at the very top of the chain, who are the hardest to reach because they are so many steps away from the front line where the drugs are being made available.

The Bill addresses not just the drugs problem but illegal immigration racketeers, illegal arms dealers and those who become involved in multiple vehicle theft. That is why we need to address the issue differently.

Organised crime is changing. It is more organised, more complex, more insidious and more international than ever before. That is why our police need extra support. They need not just extra financial support but extra skills, which are different from those which have been evident in the police force in the past. That is why we are right to make it possible for the Security Service to co-operate in a way that has not been possible in the past.

The Security Service has particular skills in long-term information gathering, surveillance, intercepting communications and other things which are vital to the police as they try to carry out their work. Although the Bill will provide extra powers for the security services, especially extending the search and entry powers beyond cases of suspected terrorism and subversion, it does not give them the same powers as the police. The police will continue to be in the lead and that is an important safeguard for civil liberties. It is important to retain a balance, so that both organisations are involved in the battle.

I listened with care to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason), but I had a feeling that he was attaching too much importance to the historical

purity of the security services and was not giving enough recognition to the fact that all the resources that we have available in this country should be used to tackle the problems that we have to face now.

It is crucial that we have greater co-ordination among the organisations fighting crime. My constituency shows clearly the need for such co-operation. It is positioned close to the borders of Greater Manchester and South Yorkshire, and it is clear that much of the crime experienced by my constituents is committed not by Derbyshire residents but by those who live outside the area and outside the jurisdiction of our police.

That is why we have needed greater co-ordination through the NCIS and the DNA database and through the mutual exchange of information, so that fingerprints from different parts of the country can be compared more clearly. That is the progress we have been seeing, and that co-ordination is vital. It must continue if we are to make it easier to tackle crime.

We need to take things further to facilitate the co-operation between the police and the Security Service. As other hon. Members have said, there is a need for caution. We need to ensure that the definitions in the Bill are fair and accurate, and that the potential for excess is avoided.

We want to ensure that we do not go too far and that there continue to be proper accountability, reporting lines and control. We need to ensure that the historic roles of the Security Service are not threatened as it continues to do its vital work. The Bill is a welcome step forward, and it is easy for me to support it tonight.

8.30 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): The Bill could well carry the title of an early Rolling Stones record—"Not Fade Away". With the end of the cold war and with the Irish ceasefire, MI5 is looking for a role. I understand that Ministers do not want it to go out of existence because other dangers might arise at some future point. It is a case of not fading away—that is what the Bill is about.

The Government want to extend MI5's role to include drug trafficking and organised crime, yet those tasks are already being performed by the police. Although it might be reasonable to consider extending MI5's role in that way, I am concerned that the original intention that it should assist the police has changed to taking the lead. That suggestion was contained in a paper submitted to the Cabinet by Stella Rimington, Director-General of the Security Service. Such a change has wide implications for the police. I am not convinced that MI5 should take the lead, and any such change must be justified by Ministers.

Hon. Members have already referred to Peter Wright and "Spycatcher". Mr. Wright said that, during the 1960s, he and his colleagues in MI5 bugged and burgled their way across London. The Bill widens the scope for bugging and burglary, because it allows the Security Service lawfully to enter or interfere with property. If the Government want that, they should consider compensation for the higher insurance premiums that people will have to pay.

There is a suspicion that the warrants to allow such behaviour are signed far too easily by Ministers. Under the Bill, the warrants will be extended to cover computers, telecommunications and E-mail. That may be acceptable where there is reasonable suspicion of drug trafficking or organised crime, but not for a fishing exercise. Ministers cannot be relied upon to draw that distinction before they sign warrants. Quite frankly, it would be better if judges were able to draw that distinction and sign warrants.

Has the Data Protection Registrar been asked about the Bill's implications? After all, the Security Service will have access to Government information technology and the ability to break encryption codes; it has even been suggested that it will have access to census data, something which Governments have always said would not happen. Has the registrar been asked about those aspects? If not, the Government have been negligent.

I am worried about the possible sub-contracting of activities by the Security Service. After all, privatisation is the name of the game. The service may well sub-contract some aspects of burglary and bugging. In what way do the powers in the Bill relate to such sub-contracting? It is my view that sub-contracting should not be allowed. I ask the Minister to respond to that point.

The Government are not in a position to do anything about the protection of MI5's informants. As the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) said, the informants against Matrix Churchill and Ordtech were abandoned when the Government's role was discovered. The Bill does not deal with that issue. That brings me to the issue of public interest immunity certificates. New and proper guidelines should be drawn up for their use, which should be restricted. I am sure that the Scott inquiry will recommend something along those lines. Judges, not Ministers, should have the final say on the issuing of those certificates.

I remain alarmed about the role of the Security Service in industrial disputes, which under current legislation are viewed as subversion. Hon. Members have already referred to the example of the miners' strike. Indeed, the parent Act is used in an anti-trade union way. Often, that subversion is put on the same footing as serious crime—and it should not be. Clause 2 provides that a warrant should be signed only for crimes that would merit three years' imprisonment. That virtually rules out any action by MI5 in industrial disputes, as very few of them would meet the provisions of clause 2. I am thinking of tabling an amendment to ensure that MI5 is removed from a role that I believe it has been wrongly given.

High finance fraud is organised crime, but MI5 has a poor record on that—for example, BCCI and Maxwell. How many other big businesses have been diddling their customers, pensioners and employees? The Security Service has not done very much about that. I suspect that it does not have the expertise for such a role.

One key problem is the role that the Security Service plays in national interest and national security matters. The scope is very wide. I am convinced that civil servants and Ministers use it for their own and their party's benefit. Therefore, a proper definition of that role must be contained in law if it is to be properly applied, not abused. The interpretation of "national interest" should not lie with civil servants and Ministers; judges should interpret it within the law.

As a number of my hon. Friends have said, the accountability of the Security Service is poor. A tribunal was set up under the 1985 Act to deal with the interception of communications, but no complaints have been upheld to date. A Security Service commissioner and

[Mr. Harry Cohen]

tribunal were established under the 1989 Act, but no complaints have been upheld to date. As far as I am aware, the Intelligence and Security Committee of this House has made no significant adverse criticisms. On that record, it seems that we have a perfect organisation—yet we all know that every organisation makes mistakes. Because no complaints have been upheld, it is obvious that they have not been properly acknowledged.

In referring to the Intelligence and Security Committee of the House—although it is not really a Committee of the House but is a Committee of the Government, because it reports to the Prime Minister—Liberty said that it could not do its job properly, because there were draconian controls on its access to information. It said:

"The 1994 Act fails to give real and substantial control of the work of the services to Parliament."

Greater accountability to Parliament is needed. There will be no accountability to Parliament or the law while there are such vague, wide definitions—or no definition—of crucial elements of the Security Service's operation that make it impossible for a judge to adjudicate on any relevant issue.

There may be a continuing role for MI5, but that should not be at the expense of fundamental civil liberties. We should improve civil liberties and the accountability of the security services to this House.

8.39 pm

Mr. David Faber (Westbury): I apologise to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and, in their absence, to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) for not being present for the start of the debate. The Social Security Committee, on which I serve, was finalising its report on the Child Support Agency. I have, however, enormously enjoyed the debate since I arrived just after the opening speeches. I especially enjoyed the fascinating history lesson about the Security Service given by my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason).

Much has been said about the end of the cold war, the ceasefires in Northern Ireland and the need to find the Security Service some role to fulfil. It is irrelevant whether the service itself is seeking that role or others are seeking the role for it. We live in an age of localised conflicts around the world, illegal nuclear proliferation and, sadly, a very fragile peace in Northern Ireland. The Security Service has a great deal on its plate without the further tasks that it is being required to undertake. I agree entirely with my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen); I do not mind whether the Security Service has sought the role or others have imposed it, it is a role for which it is clearly well designed and which it is well able to fulfil.

There is an obvious need for us to use the Security Service's expertise to help tackle the increasingly complex and sophisticated threat of organised and serious crime. It is difficult to quantify that threat. Indeed, until recently, it has been very difficult to establish the extent of the problem. As I understand it, since October, the National Criminal Intelligence Service has been piloting a notification system in 10 police forces around the country. It is to be hoped that that will prove a successful means of gathering nationwide data on the exact extent of the problem.

As serious crime becomes more sophisticated, crucial and good intelligence becomes more important. The Security Service, whatever we have been told, has a proven record of mounting intelligence investigations into the most secretive organisations. The Bill would enable the Security Service to use that expertise to complement the law enforcement agencies such as the police and Customs and Excise.

It is important to stress that the police and the existing agencies are already doing an excellent job—as many hon. Members have said. They are achieving considerable success in the fight against all aspects of crime, as was highlighted most recently in the welcome and continuing drop in the crime figures, but there is no doubt that we need the broader package of skills that would be brought to the problem by the Security Service, which were listed most recently by my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry). Those assets can only be of value and of support to the police. If anything, the Bill is not only welcome, but somewhat overdue.

What is the nature and the extent of the threat of serious crime and what are we doing at the moment to combat it? There is no single or simple definition of serious crime, and we are still at an early stage in the collection of data via the NCIS on the extent of the problem.

As the Home Affairs Committee recognised last year in its report, there is little point in worrying about the precise definition of serious crime. The Bill does not seek—rightly—to impose any such narrow definition. Key characteristics are widely recognised, although the nature of crime will always change as new opportunities for the criminal to profit arise.

It would surely be wrong to apportion fewer resources to one crime, just because it was not considered organised, when it might be extremely serious. There are certain obvious categories of serious crime—most notably the obscene international trade in drugs, about which we have heard a great deal, most recently and most eloquently from my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak.

One or two hon. Members—my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) and the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick)—have said that Members of Parliament are not always at the sharp end of drug abuse; that we are not on the streets seeing the pushers and the effects of drugs. I like to think that I am one of the Members of Parliament who occasionally sees the sharp end of drug abuse, albeit at the other end—rehabilitation and the appalling time that drug addicts have trying to come off drugs.

For someone such as me, who sees the pain and misery caused by drug abuse, nothing could be more important than to use every available resource. I was particularly glad that, just a couple of weeks before Christmas, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary came to Downview prison to see the work of the Rehabilitation of Addicted Prisoners Trust, of which I am a trustee, which is trying to break the dreadful spiral of drug abuse in prisons and crime on the outside. Many people who see the dreadful effects of drug abuse understand the problem and will welcome the Bill as a further step to fight the evil trade of drug trafficking.

What else is being done in the battle against organised crime and what are our plans for the future? At present, individual police forces tackle crime in their own areas and there are of course six regional crime squads with

more than 1,400 officers at their disposal who are able to deal with serious crime at regional, national and international level.

At the Conservative party conference last year, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced a commitment to discuss the creation of a so-called national squad to tackle organised crime, and in its report published in the summer, the Home Affairs Committee recommended that the present structure of the regional crime squads should be replaced by a more nationally co-ordinated structure.

That could, perhaps, be done by giving the national co-ordinator of the regional crime squads the executive role which he lacks. No doubt discussions between the Home Office and the police on the best way in which to put my right hon. Friend's commitment into practice are under way. We all look forward to hearing more about that.

During the debate on the Loyal Address in November, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary announced a commitment to strengthen the role of the NCIS, giving it greater freedom from the Home Office, which is surely to be welcomed.

As has been said frequently in the debate, organised crime poses a diverse threat, and it is right that a range of agencies with diverse skills and abilities should be made available to tackle it. No single agency can do it on its own and it is important that individual contributions are properly co-ordinated. Regional crime squads and Customs and Excise are already doing an excellent job. Various hon. Members have cited figures that illustrate the squads' success but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) said, it is likely that they are only the tip of the iceberg. The package of measures in the Bill will further strengthen our response to organised crime.

How will the Security Service become involved in the day-to-day operations as soon, I hope, as the Bill receives Royal Assent and becomes law? Clause 1 extends the functions of the Security Service to uphold our national security and maintain our economic well-being. A new, third, function will be to act in support of law enforcement agencies to detect and combat organised crime.

It is crucial to note that the Security Service will be supporting the police and Customs and Excise in accordance with the arrangements for co-ordination, which can surely best be made between the director-general and the agencies. It is obviously important that members of the Security Service should familiarise themselves as soon as possible with the workings of and the personnel in the police forces and Customs and Excise departments with which they will be dealing.

A number of key principles should be established to govern that co-ordination. Law enforcement agencies must retain the principal responsibility for countering serious crime. Work against organised crime will be co-ordinated by the NCIS and other co-ordinating groups. The Security Service will not set its own tasks, but will rely on groups such as the NCIS and Customs and Excise to set them for it. The Security Service has, over many years, established excellent working links with law enforcement agencies throughout the country, and it is crucial that they should be built on as soon as possible.

A successful and harmonious working relationship between the Security Service and the police is at the very heart of the Bill's success. Those of us who recognise the outstanding work done by our individual local police forces and who speak up on their behalf regularly would not want anything that might harm or weaken their ability to combat crime locally to be done.

It is understandable that the police should have expressed anxieties during the preparation of the Bill. I am delighted that its final version has been reached in agreement with them. The police work under extremely strict legal guidelines. They greatly value the reputation for accountability and transparency that they have built up with the public over many years. They are naturally concerned that any work undertaken by the Security Service should adhere to existing arrangements under which they already work.

I very much hope that the police will be reassured by certain key principles, first, that the prime responsibility for countering organised crime should remain with the law enforcement agencies, most notably the police themselves. Secondly, as I have already described, the Security Service will be set its tasks by the NCIS and other, existing, co-ordinating groups. Thirdly, the Security Service will at all times act in support of the NCIS, local police forces, regional crime squads, Customs and Excise and whoever tackles a particular crime. The police will also be reassured by the fact that the Security Service will at all times draw on its full range of skills, capabilities and expertise. It is vital that it devotes the full range of its resources to the new part of its job just as it would to any existing interest.

As my right hon. Friend the Minister knows only too well, it is vital to those of us who have devoted considerable energy during the past two years to safeguarding, and we hope increasing, the funding available for our local police forces that the cost of Security Service involvement should be borne by the service itself. It should not affect adversely in any way existing police funding settlements. The resources that the Security Service chooses to devote to its new function are for it to decide and will depend on existing commitments.

Initially, the service might find the additional resources from within its existing budget. Given the uncertainty of the world in which we live, however, it should always be ready to respond to unforeseen circumstances to protect our national security. I strongly hope, therefore, that given the Security Service's important new role, Ministers will consider carefully at all times the resources that are available to the service via the single intelligence vote.

We live in an ever-changing world, but one that is still dangerous. The old threats might not seem quite the same, but the Security Service still has a crucial role to play at home and abroad in safeguarding the national security of the country. The menace of organised crime, especially the evil of drug trafficking about which we have heard so much today, is ever more with us and poses every bit as great a threat as did the issues of old to the well-being of future generations. The Bill will greatly strengthen the hand of the police in the battle against such crime. I hope that it will be supported by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

8.51 pm

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): Like many of my colleagues who have already spoken, I am critical of the Bill because I believe that any worthwhile parts of MI5 should be absorbed into the police force and made subject

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to the normal rule of law. I say that because there is a deeply entrenched climate of treason within MI5. We have all heard about the events in the 1970s and the events in Northern Ireland, but the climate of treason and strong links between the Conservative party and MI5 officers have been endemic throughout the century.

We all know about the Zinoviev letter, which led to the downfall of the first Labour Government in 1924. It is now believed to have been produced by two Russian emigrés who were working in Berlin. They passed the forgery to an MI5 officer, Donald im Thurn. Once in the hands of MI5, senior officials realised that its details of an alleged communist plot would be a devastating blow to the Labour Government in the closing days of the election campaign. MI5 leaked the letter to a Tory Member of Parliament and former intelligence officer, Sir Reginald Hall. It also leaked it to Tory central office and the *Daily Mail*, which obligingly ran it on its front page.

In the run-up to the 1929 election, the links between MI5 and the Tory party were renewed. The head of MI5's investigation branch, Major Joseph Ball, was employed by Conservative central office to run agents inside the Labour party. After the election, Ball was rewarded with the directorship of the Tories' research department.

The major problems inside MI5 concern its relationship with the former Prime Minister Harold Wilson. As the Minister responsible for trade in the Attlee Government, he attempted to increase exports to the USSR. He constantly ran up against United States Government opposition towards any growth in such trade. Wilson felt that the United States used the hysteria of the cold war to prevent Britain from increasing its trade with the USSR. His was not a position that was likely to be viewed with favour in MI5. In fact, there was near hysteria in MI5 when he was sent to the USSR to negotiate the sale of 20 advanced jet engines. Wilson was only a junior Minister carrying out a Cabinet decision, but from that point on he was viewed with suspicion by MI5 officers.

When the unexpected death of Hugh Gaitskell led to the election of Wilson in 1963, MI5 immediately tried to recruit Wilson's campaign manager, George Caunt, to spy on the Labour leader. Shortly before the 1964 election, the FBI told MI5 that it had discovered a KGB mole who had been operating inside MI5 in the key post-war period. The fact that Sir Anthony Blunt was a KGB agent and had close connections with the Queen was certain to create a spy scandal as damaging as that of Kim Philby. Even worse for MI5 was the knowledge that it had been tipped off about Blunt's spying a decade earlier and had failed to take action. It now feared that Wilson would use the opportunity of the scandal to dismember its organisation. Sir Roger Hollis, then director-general of MI5, and Arthur Martin, head of the counter-espionage department, decided on a cover-up and did not even tell the outgoing Tory Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan. Instead, Blunt was granted immunity and was interrogated by Peter Wright, who made the position clear in "Spycatcher", when he wrote:

"We had strict orders from successive Director-Generals to do nothing that might provoke Blunt to go public."

All that was concealed from Wilson when he became Prime Minister, and he was also not informed when Hollis and his deputy, Graham Mitchell, eventually came under suspicion as KGB moles.

Other news was kept from Wilson. In 1961, Anatoli Golitsin, a KGB defector, had arrived in the USA with all sorts of wild allegations few of which yielded anything of substance except the identity of the Admiralty spy, John Vassall. By coincidence, shortly after Wilson's election as Leader of the Opposition, Golitsin was sent to Britain to be interviewed by MI5. His agreed fee was £10,000 a month—£70,000 at today's prices—which was a considerable incentive to keep the interest of his MI5 hosts. Although he had made no mention of it during his two-year interrogation in the USA, Golitsin now told MI5 that he had heard of a KGB plot to kill the leader of a west European political party so that its man could take over. That was all that Peter Wright and other extreme right-wingers inside MI5 needed to confirm the suspicions that had been hanging around ever since the jet engine trade deal and Wilson's annual visits to the USSR while in opposition. They believed that the assassinated party leader had to be Gaitskell.

Oblivious to the suspicions of MI5 and the CIA, the new Labour Prime Minister Wilson issued instructions that MI5 was to stop tapping the telephones of Members of Parliament, although it never occurred to him that MI5 could continue to get access to the information gleaned from taps on Members of Parliament run by the CIA or GCHQ. He also instructed that MI5 should stop using Members as agents without knowing that one Tory Member, Captain Henry Kerby, had been used by MI5 to ingratiate himself with Wilson's shadow Cabinet colleague George Wigg by spying on the Tory party for Wigg. It gives one great encouragement that such people might have a greater role in law enforcement in the future.

The instructions from Wilson caused deep resentment inside MI5, where some officers retaliated by leaking damaging bits of gossip about members of Wilson's Government from MI5 files to the press. That was of course a breach of the Official Secrets Act 1911, but no one has ever been prosecuted.

MI5 believed that seven members of Wilson's Government and three other Labour Members of Parliament were either spies or at the very least security risks. Only one of those 10, Will Owen, the Member of Parliament for Morpeth, eventually turned out to be guilty. He had been taking £500 a month from Czechoslovakian intelligence in exchange for low-grade information that it could most probably have got cheaper by buying *Hansard* and reading the quality press. All the other names on MI5's list were completely innocent, but that did not stop MI5, in particular Peter Wright, hounding Bernard Floud, who had been devastated by the death of his wife. MI5 pursued him until he finally committed suicide in a moment of despair.

When Treasury Minister Niall MacDermot had his promotion to the Cabinet blocked following MI5 pressure on Wilson, he resigned from politics in disgust. The other seven Members on MI5's list were John Diamond, Tom Driberg, Judith Hart, Stephen Swingler, John Stonehouse, Barnet Stross and, of course, Wilson.

The MI5-inspired rumours about Wilson eventually reached the ears of former Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, who asked James Scott-Hopkins, a former MI6 officer who had become a Tory Member of Parliament, to conduct his own investigation to discover whether there was any danger of Wilson's being blackmailed.

In the summer of 1967, people from MI5 met people from the CIA, the FBI and the Australian and New Zealand security services in Melbourne, Australia, where they were addressed by Golitsin about his Wilson allegations.

Matters began to hot up when the press baron Cecil King, a long-standing MI5 agent, began to discuss the need for a coup against the Wilson Government. King informed Peter Wright that the *Daily Mirror* would publish any damaging anti-Wilson leaks that MI5 wanted aired, and at a meeting with Lord Mountbatten and the Government's chief scientific adviser, Solly Zuckerman, he urged Mountbatten to become the leader of a Government of national salvation. Lucky old Britain. Zuckerman pointed out that that was treason, and left the meeting. The idea came to nothing because of Mountbatten's reluctance to act.

All that might seem quite eccentric in the cold light of day—[HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] Absolutely. Conservative Members with lunatic—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I am not concerned with eccentricity, but I am concerned with the fact that we are dealing with the Second Reading of a Bill. The hon. Gentleman must now relate his remarks more closely to the Bill.

Mr. Livingstone: Madam Deputy Speaker, I am pointing out that treason against Labour Governments has been endemic in MI5 throughout its history, and that it has co-operated with Conservative Members of Parliament against the elected Government of the day. On those grounds, and because I do not believe that Stella Rimington or anybody else has done anything to change the climate of treason in the organisation, I oppose the Bill. I believe that MI5 should be broken up, and any worthwhile bits of it given to the police to operate as usefully as they can within the law.

What I have described might seem quite eccentric, but it is important to remember that a former intelligence officer once drew up plans about where to site an internment camp in the Shetland islands for Labour Members of Parliament and trade union activists whom MI5 felt might be disloyal, if it felt it necessary for the state to step in.

The late Harold Wilson was not the only one under suspicion. While the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) was Leader of the Opposition, the Tory Member of Parliament, Captain Henry Kerby—as I have explained, he was an MI5 agent who had ingratiated himself with George Wigg—was used to spread rumours that the right hon. Gentleman was a homosexual who had had an affair with a Swedish diplomat.

Doubts about the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup were not confined to the more extreme elements who clustered round Peter Wright. The newly appointed head of MI5, Mr. Hanley—otherwise known as Jumbo—did not inform the right hon. Gentleman that investigations were taking place to try to determine whether Sir Roger Hollis had been a KGB agent.

The head of MI5 did not inform the Leader of the Opposition of MI5's doubts about Wilson, either, or reveal the contents of the file on Wilson that he had inherited from his predecessor, Furnival Jones, and which was kept in his safe, filed under the name "Henry Worthington".

The second factor that increased MI5's alarm at the time was the rise in trade union militancy and the swing to the left in the Labour party. Any pretext that MI5 existed to catch Russian spies went right out of the window at that point. From 1972, there was a vast growth in the sections of MI5 that were involved with domestic surveillance.

Trade unionists, peace campaigners, Cabinet Ministers and political activists in their tens of thousands became the objects of illegal telephone taps and letter intercepts. Recruitment of agents on a scale not considered necessary even at the height of the cold war meant that, by the mid-1970s, even a small group of left-wingers meeting anywhere was likely to have an MI5 agent reporting back on its activities. By the end of the 1970s, 2 million British citizens had security files held on them by MI5.

A constant drip of innuendo about Wilson's loyalty was fed by MI5 to *Private Eye*, and Michael Halls, the liaison officer between No. 10 and MI5, considered Marcia Williams to be a security risk and funnelled damaging smears about her and Wilson to *Private Eye*. As Peter Wright put it in his book:

"most people in MI5 didn't have a duty to Parliament. They have a duty to the Queen . . . It's up to us to stop Russians getting control of the British government."

Although it is easy to dismiss some of what I have described as the work of a lunatic fringe, the views of MI5 chief Sir Michael Hanley are well known. When he was asked at a seminar for junior MI5 officers what would happen if Michael Foot became Prime Minister, he replied:

"I and every other officer in the service will have to consider our position."

Other officers in MI5 did not share Hanley's sense of resignation, and 30 MI5 officers, including Peter Wright, engaged, on Wright's own admission, in 23 criminal conspiracies and committed 12 acts of treason against the elected Government of the day.

Finally, what was happening came to the attention of Sir Maurice Oldfield, then head of MI6, who took Wright to dinner at Lockets restaurant in July 1975 and asked him about the extent of the plot in MI5 against Wilson. Having heard Wright out, Oldfield told him to put MI5 chief Hanley in the picture. This Wright did the next day, and in his book he says:

"Hanley . . . went white as a sheet . . . he was learning that half of his staff were up to their necks in a plot to get rid of the Prime Minister."

While Hanley was pondering what to do to defuse that time bomb, George Weidenfeld the publisher asked to see Wilson and warned him about the gossip—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman again, but I warned him before about giving what is virtually a potted history, according to him, of MI5. He must relate what he says to the debate. The hon. Gentleman has now illustrated the point well beyond what is necessary to illustrate his reason for opposing the Bill—I take it that he does. I must also point out that he appears to be reading, whereas of course "Erskine May" tells us that Members, apart from Ministers, may not read, although they may look at notes.

Mr. Livingstone: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. As you will recall, I submitted 360 questions about MI5 and its treasonable activities during the previous

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Parliament, and every one was rubbished by the Government. I constantly received evasive answers. When I raised the matter with the then Prime Minister, Mrs. Thatcher as she then was, she denied them vigorously.

Then, of course, two thirds of the way through that Parliament, a statement was made to the House admitting that there had been a "clockwork orange" plot against the Labour Government, and that the allegations in Peter Wright's book were effectively true. A special inquiry was set up to examine how people had been damaged in that process and we then found, to our horror, that MI5 officers tried to nobble the inquiry set up to investigate the allegations made by Colin Wallace.

When we consider that record, we realise that it involves more than one or two eccentrics such as Peter Wright, and that there is clearly a culture of extreme right-wing politics in MI5, which has been there throughout this century. Occasionally there are brought to the surface very deep links with individual Conservative Members of Parliament who have been able to use MI5, disinformation and black propaganda to damage Labour Members of Parliament and Governments.

I believe that nothing that Stella Rimington has done has changed that culture of treason and anti-Labour bias. I believe that the existence of MI5 is a threat to democracy in this country, and has been terribly damaging—fatal in some cases—to those who have been on the receiving end of it. For that reason, I believe it should be wound up. Anybody who wants to challenge any of the points I have made tonight should know that every single one of them has been proven academically. There is not a single fact in that list of horror stories which could be challenged on the ground of accuracy.

9.7 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): After the speech of the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone), it is clear that the arrangements of law relating to our security and intelligence services and to GCHQ do not give all hon. Members confidence in the integrity of the routes that they follow. The hon. Gentleman focused his attention on whether the operation of the service was accountable, decent and effective, and he will clearly have a busy time amending the entire range of the Government's legislation. He should be grateful to the Government, who have given him an opportunity to do so.

The hon. Gentleman touched on some of the matters that have genuinely concerned hon. Members on both sides of the House, including the extent of the service's remit. Listening to colleagues and to the new members of the Intelligence and Security Committee, it has been depressing to realise that there is almost no description of the remit of the service given within the body of legislation; yet, with regard to the drug problem, the SIS has a mandate for serious international crime, so it can follow the matter through. Why, then, do we need the changes to the Security Service?

The Security Service has as its remit national security. That is a huge swathe of a definition that has concerned bodies and communities overseas that have taken common law and the English language as their subject. They include groups in Australia, New Zealand, the United States and, of course, the fabulous and famous MacDonald commission in Canada. The commission examined the great difficulty that we face—balancing our freedoms and liberties on the one hand and our security on the other. The commission made that fabulous comment regarding freedom "under the law".

What we have today is an incoherent system of control, or half-control. It is difficult to thread one's way through the subject. We have a Committee made up of Members of this House and of another place whose remit is so limited that it is excluded from examining the commissioner's work and aspects of tribunals. The Committee cannot look back before the time it came into existence, and cannot look at some of the questions that have caused anxiety in the House.

The Bill gives an opportunity to try to define within the terms of the MacDonald commission and with regard to our liberties and freedoms what is necessary in terms of appropriate oversight. But, more important, it provides a definition in statute of what are the appropriate tasks. These are not general phrases that can give rise to anxieties among hon. Members that the tasks are being carried out improperly. I happen to believe that they are not, and there is no reason to think that they are.

Why are we, of all the advanced democracies in the world, so secretive and self-obsessed with what is the proper and prudent defence and protection of our liberties, certainties and confidence as citizens of the United Kingdom? This secrecy derives from the defence of the realm Acts of the second world war, and it can be heard from some of the older fuddy-duddy judges. The intense secrecy almost leads to the Government coming upon the rocks over the Scott inquiry. It is necessary to lie to one another in Whitehall and to keep the House of Commons understanding that a policy is contrary to what it actually is; the whole thing then blows up in one's face.

One of the difficulties with the Bill is that we hear much about the wonderments of the service, but how do we know? Where is the body of information? We have never had a White Paper or any of the other instruments of Government on this subject. There has never been a set of principles enunciated as to what guides the United Kingdom Government and the House of Commons in the conduct of what is, let us remember, the most onerous of intrusions into the freedoms and liberties of our people. We have learnt that most of the activities of the Security Service—carried out under some vague concept of prerogative power—were not lawful. Therefore, the House had to legislate to put on a lawful basis something that hitherto had been unlawful.

The range of legislation includes not just the intelligence and security services Bills but the interception of communications measures and also something that has not been mentioned, the Official Secrets Act. The House can imagine how onerous that Act is. I, as Secretary of State, can notify someone, and that individual, once notified, commits an absolute offence if he reveals any aspect of his work. That is why I shall be supporting the Bill on whistle-blowers which is to come before the House on 1 March. Our freedom is the first concern of this House, and security is necessary for our freedom.

I wanted to question how the information was evaluated. I have heard reference made to the good work carried out by the Home Affairs Select Committee on organised crime, but I see nowhere in the Committee's

reports interviews with security services personnel, or with police who said that they wanted the intelligence services to come into the police's business to guide and assist them. In fact, the Committee did not interview anyone, and the section on intelligence gathering is what one might call a commonsense attempt to try to get the facts. We have not been told the views of those who are involved in protecting our security, liberty and freedom. However, the police are accountable, and their operations are transparent. These are fundamental questions.

The only two speeches today that were worth anything—if everyone else will forgive me—were those of the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and of my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason), who expressed great anxieties and asked how the Bill had come about. From where did the push to task the intelligence services—we should never forget that they are self-tasking—with this new power come? I do not know the balance of the argument because we have had no White Paper. We have never considered in a neutral forum what is the proper balance and what are the principles that should guide us. That is important.

We do not know what the Intelligence and Security Committee gets up to. I believe that its report was extremely useful. It would have been useful if the House could have seen some of the evidence that led it to its conclusions. It cannot all be secret information.

Mr. Rogers: The hon. Gentleman has been extremely unfair not only to me but to other hon. Members who have expressed the same strong reservations. Every Opposition Member who has spoken has expressed reservations about the content of the Bill and said that he wants to amend it. Any reservations that the hon. Gentleman now propounds are exactly the same as those that have been expressed by Opposition Members.

Mr. Shepherd: I am sorry if I do the hon. Gentleman an injustice. It was not my intention to do so. My intention was to cite—I know that it is invidious to do so—the two speeches that touched on the reservations.

As we have had no abstraction or setting aside such as the MacDonald commission, it is difficult to make a judgment about the Bill. In 1993, when the first brochure was published on the Security Service, there were no plans to include crime. In 1994 in the Dimbleby lectures, Stella Rimington said that the service would become involved only if organised crime posed a threat to national security, which is one of the tests. If we examine the remit of the Security Service, we can get an understanding of some of the anxieties about whether the Bill is necessary and whether the service does not have adequate powers now.

In November 1994, there were press reports that the Director-General of the Security Service saw benefits in closer liaison with the police. On 16 May last year, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, in reply to a parliamentary question from the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien), said:

"The Government have no plans to amend that legislation."—[*Official Report*, 16 May 1995; Vol. 260, c. *191*.]

Clearly, words were going around about reform of the Security Service.

On 17 July, the Home Affairs Select Committee report was published. I do not think that it contained any reference to the intelligence services and their application. We then had an announcement at the party conference on 13 October by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister that the Bill would be introduced. Then, as a result of the interest shown by members of the Intelligence and Security Committee, its report was published on the Wednesday of our Christmas rising. The Committee had clearly been following the issue.

One of the ingredients of the report was that "serious crime" was a better expression than "organised crime". That was Wednesday 20 December. The Committee held a press conference at 12.30 pm that day. Later that afternoon—most Members of the House had gone; there had been a terrific vote the night before—the Government published the Bill. I did not have a copy. I do not know how many Members collected a copy on that Wednesday while the House was still sitting. The business for the second day after our return was the Second Reading of the Bill.

Mr. Rogers: That is putting the cart before the horse.

Mr. Shepherd: I accept the very point that the hon. Gentleman makes. Last night, the Government published their response to the Home Affairs Select Committee. Is that a way to legislate? That is all I ask. It is profoundly mistaken. One of the reasons for the crisis in the standing of the House and the confidence of the British public in it is that people no longer trust our ability to make proper legislation. It is incoherent, it is often ill thought through and it is not tested.

The Asylum and Immigration Bill has been raised. I was tempted by the idea of pre-legislative consideration of the contentions behind that Bill. I see no problem with that as a proper arrangement. The Canadians do not legislate without a White Paper, some form of commission or a proper examination of the contentions within a piece of legislation.

We are looking at this legislation blind. It will go into Standing Committee upstairs and it is my guess that I will not be a member of that Committee. I was not a member of the Standing Committee on the Intelligence Services Bill. We know how the House works, and one accepts that, but is it an appropriate and proper way to legislate? That is the truth of the matter.

Most of my hon. Friends know no more than I do about the security or intelligence services, yet they proclaim that this Bill is the most appropriate route forward. Few hon. Members have the knowledge or the understanding to know whether, in truth, it is the appropriate route. That is all that this Second Reading debate is about.

I get nervous when I hear so many hon. Members saying that everyone is wonderful and that the legislation is wonderful. I am Scottish—being born in Aberdeen, I guess that I qualify as such—and the moment that I hear such a consensus, the hair at the back of my neck prickles. There is something wrong in this. I do not know where the force came from. As recently as May, the Home Secretary assured the House in a written answer that there were no plans for this legislation, which was dumped on us on the very day the House rose for the Christmas recess. We are dealing with it the day after coming back, having had the Christmas and new year holiday in between. The House's ability to consider the legislation on the information available is very limited. That is my caution.

Is there not another way to legislate, with pre-Second Reading hearings? It would make use of the talents and resources of the House if we considered the contentions in legislation.

9.20 pm

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): I listened with interest to the reservations that the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) expressed about the way in which we legislate in the House. It is a point that the Opposition frequently make—the need for a more considered and reasonable way to deal with legislation and for more opportunity to think in advance of its publication.

That reservation is a general one and it is correct. It seems odd that it should be raised tonight, however, when there has been a reasonable and constructive Second Reading debate, which frequently does not happen, and when the sort of reservations that the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills raised have been mentioned by many hon. Members and will clearly be the subject with which the Standing Committee will deal seriously in due course. The very fact that the Home Secretary has shown a willingness to hear suggestions demonstrates that the Standing Committee stage will be more constructive than usual and I hope that the Minister of State will give us some promises in that direction in his reply.

This has been an interesting debate on the contribution that MI5 can make to the fight against organised crime, as well as the checks and balances that are essential in a democracy. There has also been a subtext of the wider role and history of the intelligence services, but I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House who have gone down that avenue will forgive me if I do not pursue them, because I want to concentrate on the Bill and the elements that need to be added to it during its scrutiny in the House.

The Bill has been introduced against a background of general concern about organised crime, which was the subject of the recent report by the Select Committee on Home Affairs. It comes at a time of increasing public anxiety about a series of particularly violent incidents. Although generally seen to be local in nature and not directly related to organised crime, those incidents fuel a public sense of unease.

In recent years, there has been a heated debate about the best way to tackle crime. The Home Secretary has offered tough action and the Labour party has certainly refined a coherent strategy to be tough on crime and on the causes of crime, but there have also been major changes in the accountability of the police.

In the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994, the Home Secretary took considerable powers over police finances—the power to set national performance indicators—and established new-style police authority committees, in which the role of elected members was reduced. At that time, there was no acceptance of proposals that were widely supported by police and local authority associations, to give a statutory basis to a partnership approach, which would have required the police and the local authority to work together and with the local community to tackle crime. For that reason, I was particularly glad to hear the Home Secretary affirm his support today for local policing and to hear that he is against the nationalisation of the police service.

How, though, is that to be achieved by the Bill? We must strike a balance between effective leadership and co-ordination in the fight against organised crime, and local accountability—two principles that inevitably involve tension, but whose importance was acknowledged by the Home Secretary.

Given the existence of police authorities in the new form determined by the Home Secretary, I am slightly puzzled by their exclusion to date from consultation on the Bill. I know that the police authorities have offered their co-operation, and that, like us, they want strong legislation that is supported in all quarters; I therefore hope that the Home Secretary will involve them as debate on the Bill continues.

The Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994 maintains the underlying concept of the police service as a local responsibility, but provides that it should also deal with serious offences that transcend regional boundaries. That is what we are discussing today. I hope that the Home Secretary will allow representatives of police authorities to be involved in discussions on matters on which concern has been expressed today by hon. Members on both sides of the House—in other words, to take part in the debate about the best way in which to achieve the Government's objectives, and to deal with such issues as structure, accountability, the definition of organised crime and the measurement of performance standards in an area of joint responsibility.

Listening to the views of experts from a variety of countries at an international conference on organised crime not long ago, I was particularly impressed by the way in which organised crime differs in different countries, notwithstanding the international element in serious crime. In the past we have tended to think of sinister monolithic organisations, but to a great extent organised crime is a market in which the entrepreneurs flourish by taking opportunities that are there for the taking. It is important to design our system of law enforcement and intelligence in a way that denies opportunity in the specific conditions of the United Kingdom, and to resist expansion into the UK market by those who have succeeded elsewhere.

There are no simple solutions. We need to retain the basic values of the British police, and local accountability, while providing national co-ordination and leadership by means of the right systems and structures.

There has been extensive debate about whether there should be a single national police agency—an expanded NCIS or a new agency—to undertake national and international inquiries, or to co-ordinate the input of agencies, including customs, as well as the police and security services. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) spoke of the need to grasp that nettle; I hope that the Home Secretary will do so quickly, and in the same spirit of co-operation and search for consensus that characterised the speeches from both Front Benches today. There are reservations about the structure and resourcing of the NCIS and its accountability, some of which were acknowledged by the Home Secretary. It is important that the Home Secretary and Parliament should lay down clear tasks for the national agency.

The Bill deals with a narrow but significant point. There is an increasing belief that, following the end of the cold war, the resources of the security services should be used in the fight against organised crime at national and international level. The Bill gives statutory authority for that—we accept the principle—but it contains little detail, as a number of hon. Members on both sides of the House

have pointed out. It does not clearly provide for the systems that are needed to provide accountability, transparency, control, supervision and discipline, and to deal with complaints.

Several hon. Members on both sides of the House—including my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) and the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason)—spoke with passion about the history of the subject, and the importance of checks and balances. The same issues have been raised by the Committee that the House established to study the issues, which has reported under the chairmanship of the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King). Several chief constables and senior police officers have also expressed that opinion over recent weeks.

In introducing the debate, the Home Secretary explained that his purpose in having a wide-ranging but simple Bill was to obtain maximum flexibility and avoid spurious legal challenges that would allow the guilty to walk free. Although I agree with him on that purpose, Parliament must be precise on the powers that it gives and the purposes for which they are to be exercised. The systems to which I referred are in place for the police and those issues must be clarified in respect of joint operations or circumstances in which the security services act in support of the police.

The Home Secretary had fuelled expectation that he would set out his approach to those issues in the debate and confirm that the police will task the Security Service to act in support of those inquiries. The verb "to task" is a rather inelegant term. Although it is commonly understood and familiar in police service jargon, it is less precise in normal usage of the English language and it has no established meaning in law. I am glad that the Home Secretary made his intentions clear and gave specific confirmation of who will task the security services, but he did not deal with the detail and it is not in the Bill.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn said in his opening comments, the Bill says that the Security Service will act in support of the prevention and detection of serious crime, but it does not say that the service will act in support of the police. It would be simple to say in clause 1 that the Security Service's function will be to act in support of the police and other law enforcement agencies in preventing and detecting serious crime. The Bill should provide detail on how accountability to the police will continue as the task that it is given at the beginning of the exercise is carried out.

The Bill refers to "serious crime", not organised crime, although the Home Secretary made it clear that organised crime is its specific target. I am sure that we shall have an opportunity in Committee to explore exactly what that means. One hon. Member referred to paedophiles and I share the Minister's view that we should not so define the Security Service's functions that an individual who is not part of an organised activity, although the activity is organised, can walk free. However, we must be specific in setting the limits of the activities and targets. For instance, would the three recent murders in Essex come within the ambit of organised crime? The Committee stage should be used as an opportunity to explore those definitions.

The Home Secretary stressed that the security services are not being given new powers. Ministers must satisfy the House, however, that the unqualified term "serious crime" is not too wide. I do not want to create a legal minefield, or the possibility that the House's intentions will be frustrated, by being over-precise. I simply want to clarify the broad intentions of the phrase. The Home Secretary's sympathies and intentions appear to be entirely in accord with those principles, so I hope that we shall have cross-party co-operation in seeking an acceptable form of words. He offered to listen to our suggestions and he will have our active co-operation in seeking to square that important circle. The right hon. Member for Bridgwater stressed the need for the Standing Committee to resolve that issue. It will enhance the House's reputation if we do so in a positive atmosphere.

In the spirit of co-operation that has characterised this part of the debate, I have given notice of the issues that we must cover in forthcoming debates in Committee. My remarks and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn reflect the spirit and content of the report to the Prime Minister by the Intelligence and Security Committee, which even the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills acknowledged as a useful report. It said:

"Within that broad policy"—

which we welcome—

"there are clearly some very important decisions to be taken on exactly what the Service's role will be, the structures within which it will work, its accountability and what has been termed by Chief police officers 'transparency'".

We welcome the fact that the Committee brought its report forward rapidly so that it might be, as the Committee noted,

"available to those involved in developing the policy and drawing up the necessary legislative changes."

Some hon. Members have commented—they are correct—that there was a very short gap for consideration after the publication of the report. Indeed, we do not have a Government response to it—we hardly could have in the time. I hope that the Minister will tell us that the Government's response to the Committee's report will be available to the members of the Standing Committee when they debate the detail of the Bill.

Some of the important points in the report should be highlighted. For instance, the report mentions "agreement on principles", and I hope that the Minister will inform us whether those principles are accepted by the Government. I refer specifically to the items listed on page 2 of the report. The report states that the Committee

"were told that preliminary agreement had been reached on a number of principles . . . as follows:

—primacy of responsibility for countering organised crime lies, and should remain with, the law enforcement organisations;

—in respect of intelligence work on organised crime, the Security Service should work through NCIS and the existing co-ordinating groups . . . It should not operate independently and unseen by those bodies;

—the Security Service should act in support of NCIS, Chief Officers of Police, Regional Crime Squads and HM Customs and Excise".

One important question is on whom accountability rests when there are local activities in a police force area. Does it lie on the NCIS or on the chief officer of police, whether a chief constable or the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis?

The set of agreed principles referred to in the Committee's report also includes an important one that was touched on by a number of hon. Members:

"the Security Service should bear the costs of its own contribution."

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[Mr. Alun Michael]

I hope that the Minister will assure us that that is the case, because it is important.

The Minister also needs to confirm the Committee's understanding on page 3 of report about the way in which the relevant agencies will be co-ordinated, both at operational level and at a policy level.

The report will be an important text for the Standing Committee when it considers the details of the Bill and what should be added to the Bill. If the type of safeguards that hon. Members on both sides of the House have requested and the reservations that have been expressed, again from both sides of the House, are not to be reflected in the Bill, they at least should be clear and in the public domain. The Standing Committee will have a more than usually important task because of the narrow and unconditional nature of the provisions in this short Bill. I hope that the Committee's debate will be constructive and helpful.

There are also elements in the report of the Select Committee on Home Affairs which need careful scrutiny. I welcome the fact that the Government's response to the report states:

"The Government attaches particular importance to increasing our knowledge of the level and types of organised crime prevalent in the United Kingdom."

Often in politics, Ministers and Opposition representatives are expected to have absolute and universal knowledge, and never to admit that they do not know everything about the subject with which they are dealing. We actually know far too little about the realities of crime. The published crime statistics are not always illuminating about realities. The Home Secretary's recognition in the Government's response to the Home Affairs Select Committee is welcome and gives an appropriate basis for trying to improve the standard of knowledge within the country generally, within the Government and within the House; I welcome his remarks.

The Home Affairs Select Committee, the Intelligence and Security Committee and the Government's response to the Select Committee show the wide-ranging debate which is going on at present. Today's debate has been characterised by the willingness of the Home Secretary to open up debate constructively, and to seek both consensus on and effectiveness in the Bill. It has also been characterised by the positive response of the shadow Home Secretary to the Home Secretary's statement. I hope that the Minister will tell us that that approach will be extended to law and order generally and to the Standing Committee proceedings.

I have to disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Hillhead. The Home Secretary is greatly to be preferred when he offers co-operation and reason than when he is in his normal wolfish guise. I am, of course, simply quoting my hon. Friend's words.

The House has a duty to protect the individual citizen and the public at large against misuse of power; after all, that goes to the root of our existence. We also have a duty to ensure that the public are protected against the serious crime which threatens the very foundations of civil society, which we exist to protect. That is a local as well as a national issue, as the hon. Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber) illustrated graphically, and most of us can think of similar examples in our constituencies.

I promise the Minister constructive debate in Committee, with the purpose of fashioning legislation that balances the two key principles. The Home Secretary invited suggestions and he has made it clear that the Committee has a real job to do. We will take up with enthusiasm the opportunity offered to us.

9.41 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): This has been a useful and constructive debate marked by a number of informed contributions. This is one of the rare opportunities I have had of reading those words, which begin every ministerial winding-up speech, with a straight face. It actually has been an informed and well-tempered debate. I shall spare the blushes of the Opposition by not concentrating at length on the contributions by one or two Opposition Members, except to say that I suspect that Conservative central office will study the contributions by the hon. Members for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) and for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) and will find some useful nuggets for *Conservative Party News* for the next few months or, indeed, the next few years. There was sufficient material in there.

Apart from those rare contributions, there has been gratifying support from both sides of the House for the principle that the Security Service should be able to assist the law enforcement agencies in their work against serious crime. Almost everyone was agreed on the principles. The only area of disagreement was whether the wording in the Bill met the principles on which we all agree. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary made a powerful case in dealing with that point and I shall now deal with it likewise. In Committee, we shall explore some of the complex legal arguments that we are not able to explore on the Floor of the House tonight so that we can, I hope, satisfy all shades of opinion on both sides of the House that the Bill will do what we believe it ought to do.

Dr. Godman: As someone who is not likely to be invited to join the Committee, may I remind the Minister that, some five hours ago, I asked the Home Secretary a question about the role of the Secretary of State for Scotland in relation to clause 2? Can the Minister, five hours later, confirm that an application for a warrant submitted by Security Service personnel operating in Scotland will be determined by the Secretary of State for Scotland and not by the Home Secretary?

Mr. Maclean: I have nothing to add to what my right hon. and learned Friend said. He made the point that the law states that a Secretary of State may sign such a warrant. In many cases, that could be the Home Secretary who has primary responsibility throughout the United Kingdom. However, it could be the Secretary of State for Scotland and it could be other Secretaries of State as appropriate. The House has sensibly phrased the legislation to permit warrants to be determined by a Secretary of State.

Many colleagues mentioned the threat from organised crime.

Mr. Rogers: I believe that the right hon. Gentleman is inadvertently misleading the House. The Security Service Act 1989 does not give any Secretary of State the power

to sign a warrant. It refers specifically to "the Secretary of State" and, under the terms of the Bill, that is the Home Secretary.

Mr. Maclean: I believe that, if the hon. Gentleman reads *Hansard*, he will say that I was not inadvertently misleading the House. I said that the Home Secretary in many cases would be the lead authority to deal with those warrants, but it could be that the legislation does speak about the Secretary of State and there may be occasions—one may wish to explore some in Committee—when the Scottish Secretary may be the appropriate authority.

Mr. Galloway: Will the Minister give way briefly on that point?

Mr. Maclean: No; we have gone through that point. It is a small, technical point.

Dr. Godman: No, it is not.

Mr. Maclean: Having served on many Committees and Scottish Committees with the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman), I am very sensitive to the argument that he makes about the Scottish legal system and some of the wonderful and unique institutions in Scotland, including the police service, but I believe that matter is more deserving of Committee than of the 15 minutes that I have left tonight.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) for confirming from the Opposition Benches his strongly held and, I believe, knowledgeable opinion, now that he serves on the Intelligence and Security Committee, that there is a genuine threat from serious and organised crime. That was described eloquently by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King). It was confirmed by the hon. Member for Rhondda, in a very telling speech. The Home Affairs Select Committee described it as a cause for serious concern, and we are taking measures on an international front to tackle that threat.

The United Kingdom has not suffered as much damage at the hands of organised crime as have many countries. No one has said that that is a cause for complacency—it is not the Government's opinion—but it is a reason for me to echo the tributes that were paid to the sterling efforts of all our law enforcement agencies. Credit is also due to our financial institutions and public bodies.

To tackle the threat of organised crime from former communist countries in eastern Europe, we continue to develop closer co-operation with Governments and law enforcement agencies in central and eastern Europe and countries of the former Soviet Union. We do so both bilaterally and in conjunction with our European Union partners.

Under the Home Office overseas drugs-related assistance programme, the countries of eastern Europe are priority targets for law enforcement equipment and training. We have given £4.6 million in aid to the region in the past three years, including support for the United Nations international drug control programme, reflecting its increasing importance as a transit route for heroin bound for the UK.

The police are also working with their counterparts and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise is providing drug law enforcement training and technical assistance in those countries and others—drug sources and transit countries. Key aims for all that work are improved intelligence and improved co-ordination of efforts among a variety of agencies. Those aims are central to the Bill before us and central to our efforts to tackle the menace of organised crime.

I believe that the hon. Member for Hillhead said that everyone who has spoken so far has claimed that the Bill is a panacea. No one claimed that; the Opposition did not and my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary did not. No hon. Member who spoke has claimed that the Bill is a marvellous panacea for all the problems of organised crime and drug trafficking in towns and cities. We have said—it was wrong of the hon. Gentleman to exaggerate those comments—that the Bill makes a sensible and important contribution to the battle against organised crime.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason), in an important speech, asked, as did other hon. Members—including my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd)—what the catalyst was for the legislation and why it was being introduced. The answer is that we have identified that in the Security Service there are some skills, especially analytical skills, and it has some resources and, God willing, if Northern Ireland continues in its present course, it may have some capacity to contribute to the battle. I simply say to the House, if there are those skills, if there is that capacity, we should all be pretty daft to look that gift horse in the mouth.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torbay asked what applications had been received by the Security Service tribunal. I can tell him that, in the past five years, 187 applications have been received and have been determined. No determination has been made in favour of a complainant, which does not imply that everything is perfect, as the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) suggested. It simply means that the independent investigators on the Security Service tribunal have concluded that the service behaved properly in respect of the 187 people who complained.

Mr. Allason: Does my right hon. Friend recognise that one of our concerns about the performance of the tribunal stems from the fact that it is not empowered to investigate anything relating to any file initiated before November 1989? Under the current legislation, therefore, if an investigation is initiated which relates to a person who was on file before then, the tribunal will say that the case cannot be investigated. Does my right hon. Friend recognise that that is the central flaw in the current arrangements?

Mr. Maclean: I recognise the facts that my hon. Friend has stated, but not that they constitute a central flaw in the arrangements. I repeat that the tribunal did not find in favour of any of the 187 complainants. The House set up the arrangements and has, I believe, generally been satisfied with them. They are a form of redress that did not exist before.

I come next to an extremely important point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay, by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) and by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) in his excellent speech. I set out the following facts in order to satisfy some of the demands made by my hon. Friends and by the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth

[Mr. Maclean]

(Mr. Michael). I refer to the principles agreed and signed up to by the police and the Security Service. They are referred to in the ISC report as the principles that will govern the service's work against organised crime. I am happy to put them in the public domain tonight and to confirm them.

First, the law enforcement agencies and the Security Service have agreed that primacy of responsibility for countering organised crime lies, and should remain with, the law enforcement agencies. Secondly, the Security Service will be tasked through the NCIS and the relevant co-ordinating groups and will act in support of the NCIS, the chief officers of police, the regional crime squads and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise. Thirdly, the Security Service's contributions will be co-ordinated through the NCIS and existing structures; it will not operate independently. Fourthly, the Security Service will be able to draw on its full range of skills, capabilities and expertise. Finally, the costs of the Security Service's involvement will be borne by the Security Service. I hope that these facts provide the reassurance that many hon. Members on both sides have asked for.

Mr. Rogers: It is all very well to talk about the NCIS tasking the Security Service, but the problem is that the NCIS itself does not have a properly structured relationship with operational police forces. It is an intelligence-gathering agency. We have expressed strong reservations about the Bill, and I have spoken about putting the cart before the horse, because until the operational aspects of the police in respect of organised crime are sorted out, the resources of the Security Service are likely to be dissipated.

Mr. Maclean: I cannot agree. The provisions of the Bill form a discrete area of law. We are not extending the powers of the Security Service; we are permitting it to operate in a slightly different field. It is possible to do so without defining in the Bill all the details to do with the NCIS, its evolving relationship with the police, and the development of a national crime squad. We intend to deal with such matters next year if we possibly can, but the simple measures that we are debating tonight do not depend on them.

I look forward to a constructive Standing Committee in which we can explore the legal consequences of using alternative wordings such as "serious" or "organised", or "organised and/or serious" and so on. Having considered those, there are potentially serious legal consequences—I am grateful to the hon. Member for Rhondda for raising them—if the guilty go free because they have exploited a technicality as we in Parliament have not used the correct word. We intend carefully to explore those matters. If we can find a word that allows the House to feel that it has all the control over the Security Service that it needs and that, at the same time, does not allow unscrupulous lawyers to undermine cases, the Government will be perfectly satisfied.

We believe that the phraseology that we have at present satisfies that need. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary said earlier, we believe that the term

"in support of the prevention and detection of serious crime"

achieves the aims on which we are all agreed. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed is shaking his head. We do not want to inhibit the service's operational effectiveness. There is a danger that we could create a position where the service's activities would be open to endless legal challenge on the question of whether every individual action was demonstrably taken in support of a law enforcement agency, if that were in the Bill, but we shall explore that matter.

I was asked about evidence in court. Of course, the Security Service has been gearing up to give evidence in court and has been doing so. Since it has had some responsibility and has taken the lead in combating Irish terrorism on the mainland, it has worked closely and well with the police. It has learnt that, if it is to give evidence in court, it must have a police officer's skills and learn the rules of evidence. The service is conscious of the fact that, if it is to get into the court domain, much of the information that it may collect will have to satisfy the rules of the laws of evidence. It is also aware of that when it comes to giving evidence in court.

We expect that, as the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed said, the bulk of the service's work will be in using its exceptionally good analytical skills. We expect that much of it will be back-up work to the police, providing information having been tasked by the NCIS, but if Security Service officers are required to give evidence in court, they must have those skills.

A balance will have to be struck as to the secrecy that will have to be maintained, and the amount of openness that will be required in court. If the balance comes down on the side of secrecy, those officers may not be able to give evidence, which may mean that the case may not proceed, but that is no different from the position in some of the regional crime squads or in the ordinary police, where we have problems on disclosure. That is why we are taking action on disclosure.

The hon. Member for Blackburn asked about the national police squad and whether we should go for one squad or two. As the Home Secretary said, we are working through the implications of the new arrangements with the Association of Chief Police Officers. A range of possible operational models exists, but this sector will always involve co-ordination of different responsibilities. Even if we had one squad, some people would do the intelligence bit and some the operational bit. Even if there were two, there would have to be co-operation.

We do not rule out the possibility of one agency performing both intelligence-gathering and investigative functions, but no one organisation can tackle organised crime alone and I would not want to risk losing the particular strengths that the NCIS has developed in its present more specialised role. We are, however, carefully considering all those issues and I note the hon. Gentleman's marginal preference for one national squad.

The House should be in no doubt that organised crime is a menace that needs to be tackled. Organised criminal activity plays a substantial part in criminal life in this country. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary said in opening the debate, the law enforcement agencies have enjoyed some notable successes in their efforts against crime. There is no room for complacency. We now need to move forward and to do more.

The Security Service has particular skills and expertise. Years of having to deal with terrorist groups has given it considerable expertise in infiltrating hostile groups and in gathering and analysing intelligence. Those are precisely the skills that can be useful in attempting to foil organised

criminal groups. It would be wrong to deny ourselves the opportunity to put such skills at the disposal of the law enforcement agencies so that they may be used in the prevention and detection of serious crime.

The Bill will be widely welcomed outside the House. It has been warmly welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House, with a few exceptions. I believe that the British people will be pleased to learn that we are bringing in extra skilled players to support the law enforcement agencies in their work against crime. The only people who will not welcome the Bill are the criminals who will see that the Bill, together with the package of measures against organised crime to which my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary referred, is an indication of the Government's firm determination to maintain the attack against organised crime. The Bill is an excellent plank in our strategy against organised crime and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

SECURITY SERVICE BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Security Service Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums so payable under the Security Service Act 1989.—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

Question agreed to.

Delegated Legislation

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

That the draft Industrial Training Levy (Construction Board) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 30th November, be approved.

That the draft Industrial Training Levy (Engineering Construction Board) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 30th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Streeter.]*

Question agreed to.

ARMED FORCES BILL

Ordered,

That Mr. John Evans, Mr. Bruce George, Mr. Nick Hawkins, Mr. Robert Key, Mr. Keith Mans, Dr John Reid, Mr. Peter Snape, Mr. Nicholas Soames, Mr. Richard Spring, Mr. Dennis Turner and Mr. Peter Viggers be members of the Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill:

That Three be the Quorum of the Committee:

That the Committee have power to send for persons, papers and records:

That the Committee have power to adjourn from place to place.—*[Mr. Streeter.]*

Quarrying

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Streeter.]*

10 pm

Mr. Chris Davies (Littleborough and Saddleworth): I am grateful to Madam Speaker for granting me the debate.

I should be grateful if the Minister would consider the issue I am about to put to him. A quarry, which had been worked for 120 years, devastating the landscape and creating a massive and ugly scar on the hillside, finally closed in 1980. For the residents of Newhey, an urban village of more than 1,000 homes on the edge of Rochdale, its closure can hardly have come a moment too soon.

Over the past 15 years that quarry has gradually been taken over by vegetation and many new residents have moved into the village, never thinking for a moment that the disused quarry was ever likely to reopen. They certainly never dreamt that it would be turned into a super-quarry, to be excavated far below the level of water table, not simply scarring the hillside but taking it away entirely. It is not surprising that over that period they had few fears. After the quarry closed, the land that it occupied was included within Rochdale council's green belt. It was so important and so protected that just 19 months ago, when the Secretary of State for the Environment considered the report of his inspector into an application to build an hotel on the quarry site, he refused planning permission.

It is worth noting some of the comments made by the inspector. He said that as the quarry had remained closed throughout the 1980s, a period, he said, of high demand, on the balance of probability it was unlikely to resume operations. He said that the arguments put forward by the applicants were not sufficient to overcome the general presumption against inappropriate development in the green belt. He recommended that if the Secretary of State was mindful to approve the application, he should impose conditions to ensure that consents relating to mineral extraction on the site should not be implemented.

Any reasonable person could be forgiven for thinking that this was a prime example of an ex-quarry—one which would never be worked again.

Why is it that the residents of Newhey are now facing the real prospect that the quarry is not only to be reopened but to be massively extended? What the residents here and in many other locations did not appreciate was that by trying to tidy up the problem of old mining permissions, the Government blundered into Dr. Frankenstein's laboratory, switched on the electricity and woke up the monster.

An interim development order was granted for Newhey quarry in 1947, at a time when wartime priorities for development took rather more precedence over the planning considerations we have today. Planning permissions were granted which would not be granted under more recent legislation. In 1991 the Government announced that the holders of such permissions had to apply for re-registration by March 1992 or the permission would cease to have effect. That woke up a lot of people. The result of that announcement was to transform what in some cases was land assumed to have relatively little commercial value—the quarries had closed, had never been worked or the IDO records were not clear and contained potential conflicts—into land which came attached to a legal piece of paper which proclaimed it as potentially worth a great deal of money.

In addition, the Department announced that once an application had been approved, owners would have just 12 months to make further applications to determine the operating and restoration conditions. The developers were first given a good shaking then, instead of the land being kept as an asset value and perhaps used as collateral or as a trading commodity, new quarrying schemes began to appear on the drawing board and take on a life of their own.

I understand from the Wildlife Trust that planning permissions granted under IDOs have been claimed at 652 sites in England and Wales, many of which have never been developed to any extent and quite a few of which are in countryside of importance to nature conservation. The list includes 87 sites in areas of outstanding natural beauty and many others that incorporate land designated as sites of special scientific interest.

The Government have provided no special protection. On the contrary, in dealing with the oldest of mining permissions they said:

"Applications for registration of IDO permissions must be determined on the evidence of the case and not on the perceived planning merits of the development."

The fact that over a period of 50 years local conditions, as well as public attitudes, may have changed, has made not a jot of difference.

I understand that many local authorities were not even aware of the existence of many of the permissions, so old are they, and so have not made any reference to them in their development plans. Suddenly, a new housing estate or an area designated for protection as green belt finds that a new quarry may appear in its midst. In effect, that is what has happened in Newhey. The site owners applied to re-register the IDO permission. Despite the opposition of all parties on Rochdale council, their claims were upheld and approved by the Secretary of State. That is not surprising, given the provisos built into the requirements.

Certainly, the land owners have rights. Given the comments of the planning inspector that I cited earlier, a few years ago the owners may not have realised that they held such a financial asset—but they certainly do now. In his attempt to clean up old procedures, I fear that the Secretary of State has made the owners' rights very clear indeed. What rights do the local residents have? Above all, what rights of objection do they possess? The answer is that they have hardly any rights worth having. Their community has no real protection against a development to which it is strongly and almost unanimously opposed.

No doubt the Secretary of State would argue that by tidying up the old permissions he has ensured that the quarry can be worked only after it has secured planning permission from the local authority, which will impose a requirement of modern operating conditions. However, a quarry such as this in a location such as this would not have been granted planning permission in the first place if the application were fresh and original. The local authority would have had the strongest objections to it and I have no doubt that a succession of guidance papers

produced by the DOE over the years would have given strength to its arm and ample support for the objections of residents.

In practice, the local authority does not have the right to take the commonsense approach that would gain the approval of most residents—that is, simply to refuse planning permission. It can impose conditions on the working of the quarry, but only provided that they do not fundamentally affect the economic viability of the operation. It must take a reasonable approach. What is reasonable? Is it reasonable for work to start at 6.30 am? It may be in some locations, but the location that I am discussing is in the heart of Newhey. I well know that many residents find it entirely unreasonable.

The requirement imposed upon it put the local authority in a cleft stick. It wants to impose planning conditions that will genuinely protect the interests of local residents—but if it goes too far, it risks throwing the baby out with the bath water, of the applicants appealing and of no effective restrictions on quarry operations surviving. In effect, the planning authority has been stripped of all real powers. Mineral planning authorities have powers to change out-of-date permissions, but as they can do so only by paying substantial compensation to operators, it is not a feasible option.

The Minister may know that back in 1976 the Stevens committee pointed out that the mineral extraction industry had special characteristics and it recommended that it should have to accept any reasonable additional costs arising from the modernisation of old mineral permissions. In other words, a permission granted in the 1940s should not necessarily be considered a licence for everlasting life.

It is a shame that the Government did not take on board more of those points when they started the process of reviewing the interim development orders four years ago. Consideration should perhaps have been given to revoking some of the IDO permissions put before them. One must remember that the natural environment when the IDO permissions were granted was given much less priority than it is today. With advanced technology, the scale of operations now envisaged in many of the quarries may be vastly greater than was ever originally predicted.

In cases such as Newhey, a quarry which was in operation for 30 years after the IDO permission was granted and for almost 100 years before that, surely no one could argue that the original owners had not recouped their investment many times over.

As time moves on, it is surely reasonable to suggest that the interests of local communities should be given priority. As part of the process of modernising permissions, the Government should issue guidance to local authorities indicating the circumstances in which environmental and other considerations may be allowed to override the interests of a quarry operator.

The local authority should also have clearly defined rights to impose upper limits on the rate of output from such quarrying sites, which, as I pointed out, may be vastly increased because of the developments in technology and transport over the past 50 years and the new ways in which stone can be moved from quarry sites across the country.

Strengthening of the regulatory powers of planning authorities may affect the economic basis of some quarry operations. So be it. The owners of land for which mineral working rights exist for 50 years must assume and expect that changes in the approach taken by Governments over the years will affect their operations and the value of their asset. That is the risk that they take.

Perhaps it will be argued that the imposition of new conditions may conflict with the property rights of quarry owners. That is no more effective an argument than to say, for example, that if Parliament imposed restrictions on sulphur dioxide pollution from power stations, it would take away the rights of National Power—or ICI in the case of a chemical plant—to profit excessively from operations which pollute the air.

The principle that what was acceptable in 1947 will still be acceptable almost a century later—that is how long these permissions go on—simply cannot be sustained. It is not reasonable that owners should be able to demand excessive compensation for the loss in value of sites that were only given real value in the first place in some cases by a stroke of a Secretary of State's pen just a year or two ago.

The Government have acted in recent years to modernise old permissions and I do not suggest that they set out with anything other than the best of intentions. But the method adopted ignored the question of whether permission for the re-working of those old sites should be given at all. No one now would be able to gain permission to open a quarry so close to a major residential community as that in Newhey. Equally, it should not be possible to gain permission to reopen a closed quarry that belongs to another time and another age. That may have serious effects upon a local community. I hope that the Minister will tell us what action the Government will take to strengthen the rights of local residents and planning authorities in such cases.

10.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): The hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Davies) is new to the House. It is therefore understandable that he is perhaps unaware that I cannot give answers on a specific case. I hope that he will take that into account.

The hon. Gentleman has also failed to recognise the importance to this country of quarrying, mining and minerals—most obviously the energy minerals of coal, oil and gas. Those industries form a vital part of our economy. There are some 2,500 mineral workings in the United Kingdom; 900 sand and gravel pits; 500 hard rock and sandstone quarries; and 275 coal workings. In 1993, they were worth £16 billion to the United Kingdom, and they cannot be ignored. They also help to offset a deficit in our balance of payments which would occur if we had to import those minerals from elsewhere.

The mineral extraction industries also help to reduce our unemployment rate, because 36,000 people are employed in such industries. I am excluding those who work in offshore oil and gas extraction, which employs 34,000 people.

We accept that, in many cases, taking minerals out of the ground inevitably causes disruption. There can, however, be long-term benefits. It is worth pondering on that. Some of the sites have been subject to dramatic improvements, particularly where old sites have been cleaned up and brought back into a state of reasonable order.

[Sir Paul Beresford]

Ultimately, it is an obvious geological fact that minerals can be worked only where they are found. That limits the choice of locations for extraction. Modern quarrying is a major industrial activity, and must often take place in what would otherwise be quiet rural areas. Government, industry and environmental organisations have done much to develop a broad and deep understanding of the effects of such quarrying, and how we can reduce them.

Much research has been undertaken into noise, dust, blasting, and the associated traffic. The aim, which to a large degree has been met, is to offer further advice to planning authorities, which must authorise the quarrying and control it through the conditions imposed on planning permissions. It is in their hands.

It is important to recognise that the industry has realised that it must improve its environmental performance, and it has taken dramatic and positive steps to do so. Our experience shows that the most successful approach is one based on co-operation between the industries, the mineral planning authorities and the local communities; and that happens. A blast such as that which we have heard from the hon. Gentleman does not necessarily contribute to that co-operation.

The task of granting mineral planning permissions and monitoring how those sites are worked throughout their lives, and then restored, is a right of local government. It is something for it to undertake. The Government have a role; they set the right framework.

I accept that, historically, mineral extraction has been a significant cause of dereliction, but we have moved on since then. We now have an accepted policy that the land which is worked for minerals is reclaimed at the earliest opportunity to a high standard and for a beneficial use. Excellent results are being achieved, although I shall not go into them, because there is insufficient time to do so.

Many planning permissions were, as has been said, issued in the past. Many of those permissions are still being worked. The standards that we expect to be achieved on those sites are those that we would set today. That is why further action has been take in that sphere during the past five years.

The first step has been to recognise that the Town and Country Planning (Minerals) Act 1981 was not working as well as had been intended. In 1991, we brought in the Planning and Compensation Act. We legislated to reform interim development order permissions—IDOs, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned. The earliest remaining mineral permissions in Great Britain date from 1943 to 1948. Those permissions had first to be registered with the local planning authority, and the operator or landowner then had to submit to the planning authority an updated scheme of working, restorations and conditions, which worked well.

The Environment Act 1995 built on that earlier success, and made provision for similar reforms to deal with old mineral permissions, by which I mean permissions granted between 1948 and 1982. In addition, it put into place a system to review all mineral permissions, regardless of their date, periodically thereafter.

The first step in the new reforms is for local mineral planning authorities to publish by 31 January lists of all dormant and active phase I and phase II mineral sites in their areas that require to be reviewed. For active phase I sites, the list must specify the date by which an application for an approval of new conditions must be submitted to the mineral planning authority.

The definition of what constitutes a dormant site, which has been mentioned in the debate, is clear in the Act. Retrospectively, the Act defines as dormant mineral planning permissions for sites where there has been no substantial working between 22 February 1982 and 6 June 1995. Should a mineral planning authority determine that a site is dormant, it is then up to that authority to take enforcement action in the usual way against any unlawful working.

Operators have no appeal against a mineral planning authority's classifying a site as dormant, except to seek a judicial review. However, classifying a site as dormant does not annul the permission. It can be reactivated at any time, provided that the operator can comply with full modern conditions for the site's working and restoration. Those conditions do not attract compensation.

The Environment Act also provides for periodic reviews at 15-year intervals of all mineral permissions, irrespective of the date when they were granted, to ensure that they are kept up to date.

I turn now to the specific issue of reopening mineral workings. Sites can suspend operations for a number of reasons—market conditions, unexpected geological problems, rationalisation and so on. Suspension of working does not in itself mean that operations should not be allowed to recommence when circumstances improve, or when temporary problems have been overcome, provided that they are carried out in accordance with the terms of the planning permission.

Where a mineral planning authority believes that a permission should not continue, it already has the powers to revoke or discontinue it, but it must pay compensation to any person with an interest in the land or minerals who suffers loss or damage. We have made it clear that the Government do not believe that it would be right to revoke without compensation planning permissions that have been validly granted and validly held.

However, as I have already said, we recognise that there is a particular problem with older planning permissions when working has been suspended for many years, and the terms of the original planning permission may have been overtaken by higher environmental expectations and improved standards. That is why, for the oldest permissions—the interim development orders, or IDOs—the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 specified that sites that had not been worked to any substantial extent in the two years ending on 1 April 1979 could not restart until full modern operating and restoration conditions had been approved by the mineral planning authority. Similarly, the 1995 Act provides that for pre-1982 sites where no substantial working has been carried out between 1982 and 1995, working cannot restart without full modern conditions. In neither case is any compensation payable.

Those are tough requirements, and they will ensure that dormant sites cannot be reactivated without a full consideration of all the issues, and the imposition of stringent modern planning conditions.

Mr. Chris Davies: The Minister rightly said that I had given him a local example. I would not expect him to respond in detail to that—although I tried to use the example of Newhey as an illustration of the wider problem. He referred at length to the new Environment Act 1995, which has already been helpful in some cases in Rochdale borough—but the IDO problem is my main concern.

Although the introduction of modern planning conditions may be helpful in some instances, it does not deal with the problem caused by a quarry such as that in Newhey—there are probably others on many sites throughout the country—which simply would not be given planning permission in the first place if there were a fresh application. The site is a dead quarry, 150 years old, which is now being brought back to life. Does the Minister acknowledge the need for stronger powers for local authorities to recognise the changed circumstances in which such a quarry is now expected to operate?

Sir Paul Beresford: The hon. Gentleman is underrating the powers of the local mineral authority. The authority can impose strict environmental standards under the new legislation and the various guidance notes. I repeat that I cannot refer to a particular case, but the powers in the hands of the planning authority are considerable. I would like the hon. Gentleman to ponder on that before he comes back and raises the matter, as I suspect he will in a written form at the first opportunity.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-four minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 11 January 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *[Lords]*

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Promoters of the City of Westminster Bill *[Lords]* may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the Bill in the present Session; and the Petition for the Bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable thereto shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That if the Bill is brought from the Lords in the present Session, the Agents for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration signed by them stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the Lords in the last Session;

That, as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be read the first and second time and committed (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read and committed) and shall be committed to the Chairman of Ways and Means, who shall make such Amendments thereto as were made by him in the last Session, and shall report the Bill as amended to the House forthwith, and the Bill, so amended, shall be ordered to lie upon the Table;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during any previous Session.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered on Thursday 18 January.

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

Alcoholic Drinks and Tobacco (Smuggling)

1. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what priority he attaches to tackling the smuggling of alcoholic drinks. [7076]

3. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to counter the smuggling of tobacco and alcoholic drinks. [7078]

The Paymaster General (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): The Government take a serious view of smugglers, who seek to evade payment of revenue duties and undermine legitimate trade. Customs and Excise has about 250 single market excise staff specifically engaged in countering smuggling of alcohol and tobacco. Additionally, other Customs staff involved in audit and investigation work make an important contribution.

In the 12 months to 30 September last year, Customs and Excise made more than 3,500 detections related to alcohol and tobacco with a revenue value of £7.6 million. Smugglers run the risk of losing the imported goods and the vehicle used to transport them, and of a prison sentence of up to seven years.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Is my right hon. Friend working with the honest traders in cracking down on smugglers? Is he aware of the effect of smuggling on the businesses of honest traders, who play by the rules and are penalised for their honesty?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yes, I take seriously the fact that smuggling is not only anti-social and illegal but undermines legitimate traders. That is why, last November, Customs and Excise formed an excise alliance with trade groups representing those who make, transport, distribute and sell alcoholic drinks and tobacco, to exchange information about smuggling and to co-ordinate action to stop that traffic.

Mr. Hawkins: What my right hon. Friend has said will be welcome to tobacconists and those in the licensed trade in my constituency, who have been concerned about the problem for a long time. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend for the active steps that he has always taken to meet groups of people involved in the trade from my constituency and from many other constituencies. Has there been any opportunity to employ additional staff to deal with the important and serious problem of smuggling. Was it possible to introduce any particular measure in the latter part of last year, or will it be possible for the future?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yes, I can give that assurance. In the present financial year, Customs and Excise has deployed additional staff where there is a particular risk. I am pleased to say that 20 additional excise verification officers have been allocated to work against smuggling during the coming financial year. We take the threat seriously, and deploy resources accordingly.

Mr. Skinner: I think the Government have a cheek to talk about controlling smuggling of any kind, because when I met the customs officers in Southend last year, their biggest complaint was not about 20 new workers but about the fact that thousands of them had been given the sack and sent to the dole queue. What they are concerned about—

Madam Speaker: Order. I should like to hear a question from the hon. Gentleman. He has not yet put a question to the Minister.

Mr. Skinner: If the Minister is really concerned about dealing with smuggling, what he ought to do—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is a long-standing Member of the House, and he knows that it is Question Time. He may have a perfectly genuine question to put to the Minister, but he must put it in the form of a question, not make a statement.

Mr. Skinner: Why does the Minister not get off the backs of the customs officers and allow them to do the job that they are intended for—dealing with all those problems? Instead of talking about 20 staff being added, why does he not ensure that the thousands who have been sacked get their jobs back?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: It is good to know that old Labour has survived into the new year, and still believes that public services require ever-more staff at ever-higher public cost. We believe in deploying staff effectively—where the risk and threat arise. I explained in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) that we are deploying extra excise verification officers to deal with the smuggling risk in the areas affected.

Ms Primarolo: Is the Minister aware of the significant discrepancy between the amount of beer supposedly exported to France from the United Kingdom and the amount of beer that the French imported from us? According to official statistics, some 107,000 barrels of beer disappeared into thin air in 1994, whereas previously the two sets of figures were approximately balanced. We must assume that not all of that beer was drunk on a booze cruise somewhere. Will the Minister confirm that he is aware of, and concerned about, the damage being done to revenue into the Treasury, the growth of illegal duty scams and criminal activity and the threat to jobs in this country? Could he explain to the House the Government's strategy for tackling this growing criminal activity?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I do not know whether the hon. Lady wrote her question before she heard my earlier reply, but I have outlined the additional staff and resources that we are deploying. The hon. Lady has reminded the House of something that is at least partly true—that cross-border shopping is only a part of the trade and smuggling is only a part of the problem. There is also a threat caused by the diversion of exports back on to the home market having received the repayment of excise duty. It is to counter all of those threats and illegalities that we have formed the excise alliance with the trade and deployed additional staff. In his Budget, my right hon. and learned Friend—recognising that specific problems affected certain excise items—either froze or reduced duty in some cases.

Mr. John Townend: May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the successes of Customs, but may I remind him that hundreds of millions of pounds of smuggled goods are coming over? If we could only take the simple precaution of having a customs officer open the doors of the dozens of transit vans which come over on the cross-channel ferries, we could stop this. However, I am told that that is against European Union regulations. If French industry was being damaged, can one imagine that the French would take any notice of the regulations? If we cannot open the doors of vans at the port, why can we not have a road block 50 yd down the road?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: As I think that my hon. Friend recognises, the single market in Europe means that a port is no longer a routine fiscal frontier. However, that does not mean that we cannot open doors and examine cargoes where excise duty fraud is suspected. When I visited Dover last year, I saw the excise verification officers carrying out effective checks to counter the menace.

Economic and Monetary Union

2. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what criteria, other than those specified in the treaty of European Union, Her Majesty's Government apply as relevant to successful monetary convergence within the European Economic Community. [7077]

7. **Mr. Purchase:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are his conditions for deciding whether Britain should use its opt-out in respect of proceeding towards economic and monetary union. [7082]

12. **Mr. Renton:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the permanence of the convergence criteria in the Maastricht treaty for countries wishing to join the single currency. [7087]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. William Waldegrave): The convergence criteria are set out in the Maastricht treaty. We regard differences in productivity growth and flexibility of labour markets as also being relevant. The opt-out negotiated by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister means that we are not committed to join a single currency. We would seek to join only if it were in our national interest at the time.

Mr. Spearing: Does the Minister agree that the criteria would have knock-on effects for the criteria used for determining Treasury policy? Is the Minister aware that article 109.j.1. and protocol 6 article 3 state that a country must operate successfully inside the exchange rate mechanism—in whatever band—for two years before 1 July 1998? Would not that criterion produce problems for the Government's policy and for the country? Will the Minister list those problems? Would they include some of the difficulties being faced by Mr. Juppé and President Chirac?

Mr. Waldegrave: On the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, all those matters will have to be judged at the time a country decides to go in or not. On his second point, which related to ERM membership before a country can join any single currency, the Prime Minister has made it perfectly clear that we would not be rejoining the ERM in this Parliament, and that we would not be going back into an ERM comparable to the old one in any Parliament in the future. Therefore, it will be for the Heads of Government at the time to judge whether the exchange rate economic criteria have been met.

Mr. Purchase: Would it not be a much easier decision for the Government to take if only they attended to the weakness and the lack of competitiveness of our leading companies—factors that have been exemplified by the appalling trade figures that have been announced? Would it not be better for the Government to spend their time attending to that so that we became a more prosperous nation, on the back of wealth-creating industries, than to trouble themselves over the niceties of convergence policy, which will eventually strangle us in any event?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Member is a little confused. If one looks at the list of the most profitable companies in Europe, one finds that the lion's share of them are British companies. The hon. Gentleman is also unwise to go on one month's trade figures. The Labour party suffered from that mistake back in 1970. He might like to wait for the next month's trade figures, because the overall position on trade is not at all bad.

The hon. Gentleman would be unwise to wish to mimic some of the conditions that exist in Europe, particularly in the socialist countries. Although it gives me no pleasure to say it, as our unemployment rate steadily declines towards 2 million, it is sad to see German unemployment rising towards 4 million.

Mr. Renton: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there are two different views about the convergence criteria in the Maastricht treaty? One view is that they could be regarded as shackles which will lead to higher unemployment in some of the weaker European economies; the other is that they are a totally necessary discipline to ensure that any country joining the European single currency has been exercising proper budgetary control, and control over its budgetary deficit. To which of those views does my right hon. Friend subscribe?

Mr. Waldegrave: My view is that the disciplines that we have accepted are disciplines that we would have been happy to accept, whether or not Maastricht or convergence criteria existed. It is sensible to manage the economy in order to reduce debt and to have low inflation. It is sensible for the whole continent of Europe to manage its economy so that there is the minimum disruption and movement.

Sir Peter Tapsell: While I am much heartened to hear my right hon. Friend re-affirm the Prime Minister's statement that a Conservative Government will never allow this country to rejoin an exchange rate mechanism, how is that to be reconciled with the fact, if I am correct, that the machinery for joining a single European currency at any time requires re-entry into the ERM 12 months beforehand?

Mr. Waldegrave: That question is related to the one asked by the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing). It will be for the Heads of Government at any future summit to judge whether any exchange rate criteria have been met. As the Prime Minister has said to the House, the exchange rate mechanism, with its narrow bands, that existed at the time of the Maastricht treaty cannot be said truly to exist at all now. The problems for the Heads of Government will be interesting.

Mr. Shore: Following the Minister's interesting replies and his confirmation of what the Prime Minister previously told the House about not joining the ERM in this Parliament or any other Parliament—if the Government are re-elected—can he say clearly whether membership of the ERM is still a condition for joining a single currency? It is not just a matter of interpretation, because the condition that we are a member for at least two years before the operation date is written into the treaty itself. Is the Minister saying that provisions written into the treaty are just a matter for interpretation and consideration, or is he saying that the treaty has no real validity?

Mr. Waldegrave: The right hon. Member makes a fair and interesting point. I think that the Heads of Government will find themselves in some difficulty, because the ERM which existed at the time of the Maastricht treaty does not now, according to most interpretations, exist.

Mr. Yeo: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the key criteria for judging whether we should join a single currency is whether it will be in the national interest to do so? Does he further agree that, in order to preserve that freedom, the vital consideration at that time—indeed during the whole of the intervening period—is neither to rule out the possibility of joining within any specified time frame nor to enter into any commitment to join until we can judge whether it is in our interest?

Mr. Waldegrave: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. It is the achievement of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to have put this country, uniquely in Europe, in that position. It is odd that the Labour party, and especially the Leader of the Opposition—who now describes himself as a born-again Thatcherite, which is a surprising description—apparently see no constitutional issues at all, according to the quotations that I have read, in joining the European monetary union. It is for that reason that my right hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones) was right to put that point to the Leader of the Opposition the last time the House discussed these matters. As the Leader of the Opposition sees no constitutional or other implications, we must take it that, if we have met the convergence criteria, he regards whether we join as merely a technical matter. That is not the position on the Conservative side of the House.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Given that the Prime Minister has failed to persuade the Italian Government to co-operate in delaying the start of the potential EMU, in spite of the Italian Government's difficulties in meeting the criteria—a meeting perhaps of the unwilling and the unready—will the right hon. Gentleman assure the House that it remains Government policy to validate their opt-out by ensuring that they are capable of meeting the time scale, because otherwise he must accept that the opt-out will have no validity, in or out?

Mr. Waldegrave: The United Kingdom will meet the criteria. A large number of other countries—most surprisingly, even Germany itself at the moment—do not meet the criteria. The situation that was foreseen at Maastricht is, in any case, not going to come about. It was then foreseen that all the countries of Europe, with the exception of the United Kingdom, which had negotiated an opt-out, were going to move smoothly into a single currency. It is clear that, whatever happens, a large part of the European Union is not going to join a single currency—at least, not at the first available date.

Mr. Nicholls: Given that my right hon. Friend has a powerful and inventive mind, what conceivable circumstances could come about which would make it in this country's best interest to surrender for ever its fiscal independence, which would be the inevitable consequence of going into a European single currency?

Mr. Waldegrave: It was a saying of the previous Prime Minister, my right hon. and noble Friend Lady Thatcher, that it is unwise to take decisions until one has to take them. It is the strength of this country's position, negotiated by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, that, if we want to, we can consider those issues at the right time. At the moment, they are entirely hypothetical.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: What is the Government's policy on the use of the opt-out? Will the right hon. Gentleman

set out the criteria for determining the national interest? Are they summed up by the former Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who said:

"I don't want to see a single currency—period",

or by the Deputy Prime Minister, who said that there can be

"no truly unified market without a single currency . . . A close association of monetary policies will be needed if the Single Market is not to be put at risk"?

Will the right hon. Gentleman end the confusion on Government policy on the opt-out?

Mr. Waldegrave: There is no confusion on the Conservative side of the House. It is a little unwise of the Labour Front Bench, half of whom were elected on a platform of leaving the European Community altogether and now regard whether we go into a single currency as merely a technical matter, to accuse us of confusion on this matter. I could read out quotations, to the embarrassment of members of the Labour Front-Bench team, about their position of conscience on how important it was to leave the European Community. Some of their right hon. and hon. Friends have stuck to that; they have thrown it all overboard.

Mr. Jenkin: Is my right hon. Friend aware that some people argue that the opt-out from the single currency has damaged the country's interest? Is he aware that that argument is advanced by Opposition Front-Bench Members? Does that not seem extraordinary when they may well support us using the opt-out if it is not in our economic interest to join a single currency?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is exactly right. The Leader of the Opposition on this, as on many other matters, has tucked himself in behind my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and takes—as far as I can tell, because the position changes from day to day—more or less the same position. He would be very unwise not to, because for any party to say that it would not look at the issue at the time in the interests of this country seems to me unwise.

Economic Confidence

4. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has to promote and encourage economic confidence. [7079]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Michael Jack): The Government's policies are increasing confidence by creating the right conditions for sustainable growth through low inflation, sound public finances and a continuing programme of structural reform.

Mr. Mackinlay: That is all very interesting, but does the Minister not realise that his complacent attitude will be received with dismay and anger by the millions of people who are languishing in the frustration of negative equity, who cannot sell their homes to take jobs elsewhere in the country because no one is prepared to purchase their homes? Many of them are people who have not got jobs and people who are not sure about their employment prospects. People are not prepared to invest in homes because they have no confidence. What is the Minister going to do about the great burden of negative equity that faces many of the constituents of my hon. Friends, and many of the constituents of Conservative Members—people who voted for them at the last general election, especially in the south-east of England?

Mr. Jack: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will calm down for a moment so that I can give him some useful information on this subject. He may recall that, over Christmas, the Halifax building society issued an excellent report, which pointed out—

Mr. Mackinlay: What did it say last year?

Mr. Jack: Wait for it. The best news comes a little later in my presentation. The Halifax building society's report said that it saw a recovery in the housing market and increasing prices. On our part, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor announced a reduction in interest rates, creating the lowest mortgage level for 30 years. In case the hon. Gentleman was half asleep at Christmas, that was good news for those who want movement in the housing market.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Although I accept much of what my hon. Friend has just said, does he accept that, to regenerate economic confidence, it is important to regenerate the housing market? Although he was right to say that the Halifax building society sees a modest rise in house prices and anticipates an increase in house prices next year, last year's figures show that house prices decreased by 1 per cent. on the previous year. Will he therefore press the Chancellor yet again to ignore Mr. Eddie George, the Governor of the Bank of England, and further reduce interest rates, which would bring about confidence not only in the housing market but industrially?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend advocates some important points. He will have noted that, at the last meeting between the Chancellor and the Governor of the Bank of England, when they jointly appeared at a press conference, they were in accord on a reduction in interest rates. I hope that my hon. Friend will not be entirely seduced by the Opposition, thinking that confidence is a single-club issue—that of the housing market. Important though it is, our economic policies are creating low inflation and the prospect of 3 per cent. growth next year, and unemployment is already down by more than 700,000. Those clear indicators of growing confidence in the British economy will cause business investment to grow by a further 9 per cent. this year.

Sir James Molyneaux: Does the Minister agree that confidence could be further restored by simplifying the methods of supplying grant assistance to relatively small companies, particularly those that employ fewer than 20 people? Might one of the instruments to do that be the enterprise investment scheme?

Mr. Jack: I am glad that the hon. Member—[HON. MEMBERS: "The right hon. Member."] I apologise to the right hon. Member. He mentioned the enterprise investment scheme, which is important as it enables those who wish to advance venture capital and seek an involvement in small, growing companies to realise the dream of growth in the small company sector. If the right hon. Gentleman has points that he would like to discuss, I should be happy to hear from him, because that important scheme is working well.

Mr. Forman: Is it not clear that economic confidence will be revived further and sustained provided that the

Government follow their current prudent fiscal policy and a cautious monetary policy? Is not the clearest evidence of the success so far the vote of confidence given by all the inward investors in this country, both direct and portfolio?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend is right. The Opposition have chastised us in recent months on league tables but they do not like to talk about the fact that the United Kingdom is top of the league table for inward investment. We are confident of our economic policies because we can answer questions about interest rates, growth and employment. The hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) should consider the fact that his party is incapable of answering any economic question on any aspect.

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Financial Secretary and his right hon. and hon. Friends should turn their minds to the reason why there are 1 million fewer people in jobs than there were when his right hon. Friend became Prime Minister. At a time when one in five households of working age have no one bringing in a wage, what effect will it have on confidence now to abolish the community action programme, denying help to long-term unemployed youngsters, who need it most? Is that not typical of the Conservative party, creating a divided Britain and denying the long-term unemployed a stake in society?

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman has failed to notice the many efforts that the Government have made to help people, such as jobseekers' programmes and education, to equip them for the world of work, and the fact that, under our economic policies, 700,000 people have left the unemployment register. It is about time that the hon. Gentleman considered his constituency and the success of the Rover car company in Cowley. That company has been recruiting about 4,000 new employees and is making about £200 million of new investment. That is the key to lasting prosperity. Let the hon. Gentleman look in his own back yard for an answer to his question.

Mr. Evennett: Is my hon. Friend aware that businesses, pensioners and families all appreciate low inflation, which the Government have achieved? Further, does my hon. Friend agree that the greatest threat to economic confidence in this country would be the election of a Labour Government?

Mr. Mackinlay: What are you doing about it?

Mr. Jack: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett), and I will tell the hon. Member for Thurrock what the people are saying in that constituency. They are saying that they understand that the Government have sound economic policies and that the Government can ask the searching economic questions, unlike the Opposition, who fail ever to answer any question about what they would do about interest rates, and about what their economic and tax policies are. The Labour party is the party of "don't know"; we are the party that does know, and we know that we have the confidence of the British people on economic policy.

Budget Statement

5. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about his Budget statement. [7080]

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has received widespread commendation for a responsible Budget which will sustain economic recovery, help control inflation, and put money back into people's pockets.

Mr. Canavan: Is the Minister aware that the recent severe weather meant that many thousands of people throughout the country suffered from freezing or flooding in their homes, yet the Budget will make things even worse by imposing a cut of 31 per cent. on the home energy efficiency scheme, which will mean that at least 200,000 homes will not be properly insulated and more than 1,000 jobs will be destroyed? Will the Government therefore reverse that deplorable decision and also reduce the rate of VAT on domestic fuel, which is causing widespread hardship?

Mr. Waldegrave: On the latter point, the hon. Gentleman should address himself to hon. Members on his own Front Bench, who failed to table a motion that would have enabled a vote on VAT on fuel.

On the former point, it seems sensible that help should go to those people who need it, and not to pensioners and others who may be well able to afford it, so we should be aiming that valuable scheme at those who really need the help.

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd: Has my right hon. Friend received representations from the bingo industry? In the recent Budget, general gaming duty was cut by 1 per cent. and pools duty by 6 per cent., but the bingo industry was excluded. That appears extraordinarily unfair to an industry that provides gambling with entertainment to millions of people, is well run and even in this day, when the national lottery is advertising throughout the country, is prevented from advertising its prize money to attract the public.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am aware of the worries that have been expressed by that industry. Especially, I believe that the latter part of my hon. Friend's question, which related to the possibility of deregulating the industry somewhat, perhaps on the advertising side, would touch a sympathetic chord in the Government. We shall examine those proposals closely.

Mr. Andrew Smith: Further to the Chancellor's remarks in his Budget statement about private finance, will the Chief Secretary tell the House how the Government are responding to the representations that Eurotunnel is making for Government guarantees to underwrite a bond to refinance its massive debt? Has a request been received by Ministers? How are the Government responding? Will they stick to their policy of no subsidy, and will the Chief Secretary give an undertaking to make a statement to the House before there is any change?

Mr. Waldegrave: There is no change in policy. There is a growing consensus between the two sides of the House on private finance in general. As the Labour party begins to understand the policy, I think that it is beginning to support it, although there are some exceptions among Labour Front Benchers.

Mr. John Greenway: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the reduction of 1 per cent. in general betting duty has been warmly welcomed throughout the racing industry? Will he take this opportunity to encourage all elements of the racing industry—including bookmakers

and the British Horseracing Board—to advance their already well-progressed discussions and reach an early conclusion on how the money should be distributed for the benefit of racing and bookmakers?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he has said. We hope to help to broker such an agreement and to reach an agreement fairly soon. It would be sensible to achieve such an agreement.

Greenbury Report

6. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the Greenbury report. [7081]

Mr. Jack: Since the publication of the report my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has received a number of representations, both written and oral.

Mr. Hain: Surely there is a strong case for legislation to implement the proposals of the Greenbury report, not least because more than half the electricity companies are being taken over and will therefore not be listed on the stock exchange in the near future. Are the Government selling out to private greed yet again?

Mr. Jack: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman asks that question. It shows that there is a fundamental distrust among Opposition Members and doubt as to whether private industry can put its own House in order in relation to the matters discussed by Greenbury. The hon. Gentleman will know that, in his report, Sir Richard stated that he felt that legislation was an inappropriate way of dealing with the problem. The hon. Gentleman will also know that the stock exchange responded with commendable speed to change the listing arrangements on disclosure, particularly of salary. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has said that a review will take place—when the pensions aspects of the Greenbury report have been studied—with a view to amending the Companies Act, where necessary, where it relates to disclosure.

Mr. Thomason: Does my hon. Friend welcome the extension of share ownership and responsible share option agreements? Does he agree that the Government should be proud of their record of extending share ownership from 3 million to 10 million people since 1979? Does he agree that that is the best way of ensuring that people have a stakeholding in this country?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend has put his finger on what real stakeholding is about: having a share of something of which one is a part. That achievement has been made possible in the face of fearsome opposition from the Opposition. The Greenbury report occasioned a thorough debate involving my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor, who was able to announce in the Budget the new company share option scheme and enhancement of the profit-sharing and save-as-you-earn schemes which currently benefit 2 million people. I have no doubt that there will be a wide uptake in British industry of further opportunities so that employees can have a stake in the companies for which they work.

Mr. Darling: The Financial Secretary seems to place a good deal of faith in the privatised utilities putting their own house in order. That faith is not shared by the majority of people. Is he aware that the abuses in the boardrooms of privatised utilities are continuing? Is he also aware that the chairman of the National Association of Pension Funds investment committee—who is himself a member of the Greenbury committee—has warned that powerful voices are trying to block and wreck the Greenbury proposals? Will he give a guarantee that the Government will introduce legislation at the earliest possible opportunity to ensure that the subject of contributions to the pension arrangements of people in boardrooms is brought forward without further delay? Will he also give a guarantee that he will not allow the thrust of the Greenbury report to be wrecked by vested interests in the privatised utilities?

Mr. Jack: Again, Opposition Front Benchers display a fundamental distrust of the idea of private companies being able to put matters right. The hon. Gentleman's attack on the privatised utilities is a typical smokescreen behind which the Opposition hide the many benefits that privatisation has brought to consumers. Many of the privatised companies have given clear public undertakings that they will accept the Greenbury recommendations and are moving towards them. If the hon. Gentleman considers the facts—clearly his boardroom lunches have not enabled him to do so—he will see that the Institute of Actuaries has been engaged by the stock exchange to work out, in consultation, how the issue of pensions and their benefit to directors should be properly valued. Once that exercise has been completed in June this year, the information will go to the revised listing arrangements and, as I said a moment ago, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will look at ways of changing the Companies Act, if appropriate, to enable matters of disclosure to be dealt with properly.

Living Standards

8. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the prospects for living standards in 1996. [7083]

Mr. Jack: Real personal disposable income is expected to rise by 2.75 per cent. in 1996. A family on average earnings should be about £450 better off next year after tax and inflation.

Mr. Greenway: I thank my hon. Friend. Does he agree that living standards have risen at least 10 times faster under the present Government than under their miserable predecessors, the Labour Government? Does he further agree that, in the stakeholder society proposed by the Labour party, people's income, or at least part of it, would be confiscated, as would part of the employers' outgoings and we would have a "Whitehall knows best" job at the worst time?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend is an astute observer of the scene. He will certainly know that since the Conservative party took office the average family on average earnings has been £4,500 a year better off as a result of our policies. The stakeholder society strikes me as the equivalent of stir-fried politics—a bit of this and a bit of that, all mixed up with no recipe. It resembles today's special—here today, gone tomorrow.

Mr. Sheerman: What effect will the disgraceful 7 per cent. Budget cut in university funding have on living standards? Is it not a disgrace to cut funding to

universities by 7 per cent., with all the knock-on effects not only on teaching and research but on the innovation and enterprise in which universities are becoming increasingly involved?

Mr. Jack: I am not certain whether that question has the approval of the shadow Chief Secretary and his agreement that Labour would immediately restore the position. I shall tell the hon. Gentleman what has happened in terms of ensuring that universities can continue to offer the excellence of their facilities to more and more students occasioned by our education policies. They have taken a tremendous interest in the private finance initiative and I have no doubt whatever that they will use that as a good source of funding to continue the expansion of that vital work.

Mr. Riddick: Are not prospects for living standards much more positive in the United Kingdom than in the rest of Europe? For example, this morning's *Daily Telegraph* forecasts that unemployment in Germany will reach more than 4 million this month and quotes German employers as being angry with the German Government for not introducing more flexibility into the work force. Does not the Labour party want to take Britain down the German road of over-regulation, minimum wages and the social chapter which will produce unemployment of more than 4 million in Germany? Does not Germany also want to take Britain down that road?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend highlights some of the important issues that make Britain an ever-improving place to do business. We are competitive, our costs are low, we are not wedded to the social chapter and, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, we will outstrip Germany and France in growth next year. Those factors will lead to further reductions in unemployment and the improvement in living standards predicated by my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget.

Budget (Industry)

9. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations have been made to him by industry on his Budget. [7084]

Mr. Waldegrave: Industry has welcomed the Budget because it recognises that it gives Britain the best chance of steady growth with low inflation.

Mr. Marshall: That is a typically bullish reply by the Chief Secretary. How does he square that bullish response with a real economic indicator such as manufacturing output, which has shown an increase of less than 1 per cent. over the past 12 months?

Mr. Waldegrave: Manufacturing output is up, as is manufacturing investment. The hon. Gentleman asked me what the response from industry was to the Budget, so I gave it. The director general of the CBI said:

"We welcome the fact that Government has broadly stuck to the prudent economic line we recommended".

Sir John Banham of Tarmac said:

"The Chancellor is on the right track".

I could give the hon. Gentleman a dozen other quotations. He asked a question, he got an answer and he did not like it.

Mr. Gallie: Has my hon. Friend considered what an income tax increase of 3p in the pound for people in Scotland would do to industry? What effect would such an increase have on wage bills and on industrial development?

Mr. Waldegrave: I think that the answer is obvious: jobs would be lost in Scotland and the high road from Scotland to England would have many more Scots on it, to the great benefit of England. It would prove very destructive to the Scottish economy and it would benefit all Scotland's neighbours.

Mr. McAvoy: Can the Minister answer the complaint by the Federation of Small Businesses about the absence of any measures to tackle the problems of late payment which affects British industry? If he has received any representations from that organisation, will he ensure that his Department—which has a disgraceful record of late payments—increases its efficiency in paying its bills?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. My Department's performance was not good enough about a year ago. I am happy to say that since August last year it has improved and it is now making just under 90 per cent. of payments within the time allowed. My Department's performance was not satisfactory a year ago and we shall see that it improves.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 11 January. [7106]

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Michael Heseltine): I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is in Paris representing Her Majesty's Government at the commemorative service for the late President Mitterrand.

Mr. O'Brien: Tonight's speech by Baroness Thatcher is set against the background of her well-known opposition to a single currency. As the one who wielded the knife that did her in, will the Deputy Prime Minister take this opportunity to reassert the Prime Minister's view that Britain should be at the heart of Europe, and his own stated view that there can be no truly unified single market without a single currency?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The whole House understands that there is a massive national self-interest in our policies in Europe. The purpose of our presence in Europe is to fight for British self-interest. That was very much the view of my right hon. Friend Lady Thatcher and it is the view of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. Each of us does it in his own way and in his own context.

Mr. Stephen: Has my right hon. Friend received his £50 electricity rebate? Does he agree that the family silver is still there and that it is working for us better than ever, that millions of people have been turned into stakeholders and that the money that they have paid the Government for their shares has been invested in hospitals, schools, transport and in many other essential services?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend. I share his anticipation and that of the electricity consumers of this country that their average bill will be £90 less next year than it would have been otherwise.

Mr. Prescott: Will the Deputy Prime Minister comment on today's damning report from the British Medical Association which says that patients' lives are being put at risk because of the crisis in the provision of acute hospital beds in our country?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for raising that very important issue. The fact is that there has been an increase in the number of emergency and accident admissions to hospitals in some parts of the country. The increase is not universal, as there has actually been a decrease in some areas.

However, this is obviously a matter of concern for the Government. It is being examined by the chief medical officer and the Government are determined to see that all proper steps will be pursued in terms of the improved management of bed utilisation which has flowed from the immensely more sophisticated treatment that is now available. We are determined to preserve the reputation of the health service as one of the most important aspects of public service.

Mr. Prescott: Even so, is it not true that yesterday an elderly man who had suffered a heart attack died because none of the 12 Yorkshire hospitals could admit him owing to a shortage of beds? Is it any wonder when one looks at how the money is spent by the Government? They have spent an extra £1 billion on bureaucracy and an extra £25 million on company cars, the number of accountants has doubled, and the number of managers has increased from 500 to 20,000—while they have cut the numbers of beds and nurses. Is that not the real reason why there is a crisis in the national health service?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The whole House is deeply preoccupied with the standards of the health service and with ensuring that they are maintained. It does no service at all to people who are sick or elderly to raise concerns and fears in the way that the right hon. Gentleman has done. Since 1948, the number of beds in the national health service has been falling under all Governments. One of the reasons why that has been happening is that today patients spend less time in hospital, because the means of treating them enable a speedier recuperative process.

I can reassure the House that, since our reforms of the health service were put in place, 1.5 million more patients have been treated every year. That is the fact that the patients of this country should hear, because it is the reassurance to which they are entitled.

Mr. Prescott: Why is it that the Deputy Prime Minister will not admit what everyone knows—the Government are destroying one of our greatest assets? They are destroying the national health service, which was given to the nation by a Labour Government and opposed tooth and nail by the Tories.

The Deputy Prime Minister: The reason why I will not say it is that it is not true. The fact is that we are treating more patients and building more hospitals, the queues are coming down and the health service is safe with the Conservative party.

Mr. Jessel: On the subject of hospital accident and emergency admissions, is my right hon. Friend aware that at West Middlesex hospital, which I visited at 11 o'clock last night, staff told me that on 30 December, the day of black ice, they had admitted 60 fracture cases compared with the normal daily total of 10? That is bound to have a knock-on effect for the next week or two when taken with the increase in asthma cases this winter. However, the staff are working hard, their morale is good and they should be warmly commended.

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises a most important point. There is no question whatever about the dedication of the staff in the health service and their ability to cope with those problems. Nor is there any universal agreement as to the causes of the increase in the number of admissions. The BMA and the chief medical officer are looking closely at the problem. It is a matter for concern, and it will remain so until it has been dealt with.

Q2. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 11 January. [7107]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Pike: The Deputy Prime Minister will recall that Tuesday of this week marked the 10th anniversary of the day on which he marched out of Baroness Thatcher's Cabinet. In view of her much trailed speech tonight, can the Deputy Prime Minister tell the House and the nation why, in 1990, he considered that it was essential that she be removed from office?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The whole House will know that after leaving Baroness Thatcher's Government I did all in my power to secure her re-election. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

The Deputy Prime Minister: As I look back on a long life of public service, I regard the fact that I played such a conspicuous role in the 1987 general election campaign, in which Baroness Thatcher was re-elected, as no mean achievement.

Q3. **Sir Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 11 January. [7109]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Sir Colin Shepherd: Has my right hon. Friend yet had the chance to give careful consideration to the speech made by the Leader of the Opposition in Singapore? If so, has he yet been able to figure out just what a stakeholder economy is?

Mr. Skinner: Mine's a sirloin.

The Deputy Prime Minister: How typical of the hon. Member for Bolsover to choose one of the most expensive and luxurious parts of the animal. At least he has the advantage of having found an answer to the question— which is more than his hon. Friend the

Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) succeeded in doing. According to *The Guardian* this morning, when asked much the same question he had this to say:

"It's warm words time again. I haven't a clue what it means. If anyone does could they let me know?"

If I may trespass on the time of the House, I shall explain what it means. The stakeholders that the Labour party would bring back are all our old familiar Labour friends—the unions, the single-issue pressure groups, the local authorities and the co-operatives. A stakeholder society in a Conservative world, on the other hand, is all about home owners, share owners, pension owners, choice, freedom and a competitive society.

Q4. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 11 January. [7110]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Gunnell: Further to the Deputy Prime Minister's replies on the question of the elderly man from Bradford who died while waiting for a hospital bed, is he aware that the admitting consultant at the intensive care unit in Leeds general infirmary described the case as just the tip of an iceberg, and said that there were hundreds of such cases? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with the *Yorkshire Evening Post* that that is a disgrace? What is he going to do about it?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have tried, when answering questions similar to the one put to me by the hon. Gentleman, to express the concern of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, who shares the anxieties of all hon. Members and the wider community. These are regrettable individual cases; they evoke nothing but sympathy from everyone involved. But it is quite wrong to believe that they are typical of the treatment that people can expect from the health service. It does this House no good in the public's esteem to try to undermine the high reputation enjoyed by the health service.

Mr. Garnier: Will my right hon. Friend take an early opportunity to come to Leicestershire—and my constituency in particular—where he will see a growing economy, falling unemployment and increasing confidence? All those things are a direct consequence of the Government's economic policies. Will he come to Market Harborough and the constituency generally to make sure that that message gets home even more loudly than hitherto?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right. The fact is that we have one of the fastest growing economies in western Europe. Unemployment has been falling for 27 months. Our inward investment is growing, and all we must ensure to keep it going is that the Government remain in charge of managing the economy.

Q5. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 11 January. [7111]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bruce: I wonder whether the Deputy Prime Minister would like to comment on today's opinion poll in *The Guardian* showing a six-point drop in Conservative support and a corresponding six-point increase in Liberal Democrat support. That could of course be explained by the decision of my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and West Devon (Miss Nicholson). May I just point out that if that effect is repeated every time a Tory crosses the Floor to our Benches, after four more defections we will lead both Labour and the Tories?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I do not find it greatly surprising that the hon. Gentleman should seek to draw our attention to the views of the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon. I find the views that she expressed in June this year slightly more reassuring:

"In troubled times such as we are experiencing at present when we have been wrongly assaulted for our Government's many fine achievements by an irresponsible press, our task is to stick together. Those old Conservative virtues of loyalty, thrift, hard work and vision must be our priorities whenever we are under fire."

The hon. Lady was right then.

Q6. **Mr. Stewart:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 11 January. [7112]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Stewart: Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to underline the success and importance of inward investment into the United Kingdom, especially into Scotland—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Let us have a little less noise on the Government Benches below the gangway. Mr. Stewart, repeat your question. I could not hear because of the noisy ones there.

Mr. Stewart: Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to underline both the success and importance of inward investment in this country? What would be the impact of inward investment in Scotland if people who work in Scotland were subject, uniquely in Europe, to the imposition of the iniquitous tartan tax?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right to draw this matter to the attention of the House and of Scottish people in particular. Under the excellent conditions that the Government have created, 100 inward investment projects, worth more than £1 billion and creating or protecting some 12,000 jobs in 1994-95, were delivered to Scotland in that one year alone. There is no question but that the only thing that would flow from the introduction of a Labour Government and the consequent establishment of a tartan tax would be that inward investment, flowing not to Scotland but to England, Wales and Northern Ireland. That would be good news for everyone except the Scots.

Asylum Seekers (Benefits)

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the regulations to reform benefit arrangements for asylum seekers, sponsored immigrants and others. I have today laid before the House the regulations together with the accompanying Command Paper.

The aim of these reforms, together with the measures in the Asylum and Immigration Bill, are to ensure that the United Kingdom remains a safe haven for those genuinely fleeing persecution; to deal more speedily with their claims; and to discourage unfounded claims from people who are actually economic migrants.

Of course genuine refugees come to the United Kingdom to escape persecution, not to obtain our benefits. Their rights to asylum will not be altered in any way, and anyone who arrives here as a refugee and seeks asylum at the port of entry will continue to have access to benefits while their claim is considered by the Home Office.

More than 90 per cent. of people claiming asylum, however, are eventually found not to be genuine refugees. The vast majority of asylum claimants are economic migrants. The number who come here is influenced by the ready availability of benefits. Relative to Britain, other European countries offer less generous benefits and less opportunity for work and have tightened up the procedures applying to asylum seekers. As a result, since 1993 the number of asylum claims in western Europe as a whole has fallen by more than a third, yet in Britain it has doubled.

Consequently the proportion of all asylum seekers in Europe who come to Britain has more than trebled in the past decade. The huge number of unfounded applications means that the tiny proportion of claimants who are genuine face an unnecessarily long process. The total cost of social security benefits alone for asylum seekers already exceeds £200 million a year, yet more than 90 per cent. of that money goes to people who are not genuine refugees. No responsible Government could ignore that growing misuse of taxpayers' money.

One way to address the problem is to speed up the processing of asylum claims. The revised procedures in the Asylum and Immigration Bill will speed up the processing of claims. But it is crucial that the new procedures are not in turn overwhelmed by a rising tide of unfounded claims. So benefit changes are essential to discourage unfounded claims.

Under the new benefit regulations, those who enter the country as refugees, declaring themselves to be asylum seekers at the port of entry, will still be entitled to claim benefit while the Home Office deals with their claim. So will those who claim after entering the country as visitors, if there has been a significant upheaval in their homeland since their arrival. But at present some 70 per cent. of all asylum claims are made by people who entered the United Kingdom as tourists, students or business men. As such, they demonstrated that they had the means to support themselves while they were here and accepted that they would not be entitled to claim benefit. Yet, under current rules, when they subsequently apply for asylum, they become entitled to benefit. We propose to end entitlement to benefit for those who entered the country saying that they were not here to seek asylum but subsequently changed their story. From now on, there will be no benefits for those who misrepresent their case.

British citizens do not receive a benefit while appealing against refusal. Successive Governments have upheld that policy, or every unsuccessful British benefit claimant would have an incentive to appeal against refusal of his or her benefit. However, under the present rules, asylum seekers are allowed to retain benefit during an appeal. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of asylum seekers appeal against rejection. Yet 96 per cent. of their appeals turn out to be unfounded. I therefore propose that once an asylum seeker's claim has been considered and rejected, entitlement to benefit will cease. They will no longer be able to prolong entitlement to benefit by appealing against refusal of refugee status. In that respect, asylum seekers will, in future, be treated in the same way as United Kingdom citizens whose claims for benefit are refused.

Particular concern has been expressed at the prospect of large numbers of asylum seekers losing entitlement on the day when the new arrangements come into force. Of course, I understand those concerns. When the proposals were announced last October, there was an obvious danger of a surge of pre-emptive claims during the consultation period to get on to benefit before the new regulations came into effect. To discourage that, we announced that those who made in-country claims or appeals after 11 October would lose benefit entitlement once the regulations took place. That announcement seems to have dampened the surge of pre-emptive claims. I have taken note of concerns about handling a large number of benefit terminations simultaneously and the transitional impact that it would have on local authority finances. I have therefore decided to amend the transitional arrangements significantly. No one will now lose benefit when the new regulations come into effect on 5 February.

The 13,000 or more asylum seekers who have made in-country claims or appeals since 12 October and are receiving income support, housing benefit or council tax benefit will continue to get benefit unless or until their claim or appeal is subsequently rejected. That transitional protection will substantially reduce the potential impact on local authorities.

However, the Government also propose to assist local authorities with any unavoidable additional costs arising under homelessness legislation or the Children Act 1989. My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Health and for the Environment will discuss the details with local authority associations shortly. I believe that this fully meets the most pressing concerns put to the Government by the Social Security Advisory Committee and local authorities. Taken together with measures proposed in the Asylum and Immigration Bill and further work between my Department and the Home Office on improving asylum decision times and priority setting, these changes will make a significant contribution to addressing the problem of bogus asylum seekers.

The Government further propose that people from abroad whose leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom is subject to some limit or condition—for example, that they should not have recourse to public funds—should be excluded from non-contributory benefits. That will bring these benefits into line with exclusions which already apply under income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit rules.

The arrangement whereby people are allowed into this country on the understanding that a sponsor has promised to support them, has been widely abused. Nearly half the sponsors renege on those agreements. The regulations will hold sponsors to their agreements and benefits will become payable only if the sponsor dies or the sponsorship agreement breaks down after five years. Finally, the Government propose to amend the arrangements to remove the Secretary of State's discretion to make interim payments in some circumstances.

No responsible Government could fail to tackle a situation where well over 90 per cent. of benefit is not going to genuine refugees. These reforms will ensure that the United Kingdom remains a safe haven for genuine refugees. They will help to deal with their claims faster and they will discourage bogus claimants who are bettering themselves at the taxpayers' expense. The changes that I have made will end concerns over the transitional arrangements, alleviate burdens on local authorities and protect the British taxpayer. I believe that the measures are both fair and necessary and I commend them to the House.

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): Is it not clear that the Secretary of State's statement is further evidence of the harshness of his Administration? Why did the Government not listen to the views of all the groups with an interest in the subject, such as immigration welfare agencies, the churches and local authorities throughout Britain, who urged them not to start down this road?

The Opposition clearly support proper measures to stop fraudulent asylum applications, but surely tackling the appalling administrative delays in the procedures would be far more effective than this indiscriminate attack on applicants?

The Opposition welcome some of the changes that have been forced on the Secretary of State, but a number of issues still require clarification today and I should like to ask the right hon. Gentleman a number of questions.

First, the right hon. Gentleman, in his statement, claims that 90 per cent. of all applicants are not genuine. However, the Government's own figures show that 23 per cent. of applicants are either granted refugee status on conventional grounds or are granted exceptional leave to remain. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept the Government's own figures in that respect?

Secondly, what are the implications for parliamentary democracy of the right hon. Gentleman's authorisation of letters to asylum seekers telling them that their benefits will be cut off on 8 January this year? Does not that show that the right hon. Gentleman expected to push the proposals straight through the House without any parliamentary scrutiny?

Why did the right hon. Gentleman originally set a timetable of only 21 statutory days between laying the regulations and their coming into force, when 18 of those days were during the Christmas and new year recess with no opportunity for hon. Members to comment effectively on the draft regulations?

Why was the Social Security Advisory Committee given only one month to consult on those vital changes when its usual period of consultation is considerably longer than that? Why has the right hon. Gentleman not waited, as he has been asked to do by many hon. Members, to have sight of the report of the Select Committee on Social Security, which is currently holding an inquiry into the proposed changes? Would it not have been better to have the benefit of the evidence that was to be put before that Committee?

Has the right hon. Gentleman seen the evidence of his own officials, who, when summoned before the Committee and asked how they expected asylum seekers to survive after 8 January—the original date of implementation—were quite unable to answer, merely replying that

"Ministers believe that in reality the majority of claims are unfounded."

How will people manage in that situation?

What consideration has been given to representations to the Social Security Advisory Committee that the distinction between port and in-country applications is an artificial one? What assessment has the right hon. Gentleman made of the evidence from various refugee organisations that there are good reasons why many applicants do not claim asylum until after they have entered the country, such as having a well-founded fear of officialdom, wishing to seek an interpreter or legal advice, or wishing to make contact with family and friends to give them support when they make the application?

Is the Secretary of State aware that, when the then Home Secretary introduced the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993, he fully anticipated a rise in the number of applications and set a three-month limit for decisions on those applications, but, owing to Home Office incompetence, the average waiting time is 19 months? Does not that backlog mean that asylum seekers who are unable to find work or alternative sources of funding will be unable to survive for such long periods without the support of the social security system?

Will the Secretary of State confirm that, following the revision of the original regulations, the expected savings are still an estimated £200 million? Will not they be offset, however, by the appalling additional cost to local authorities of, for instance, having to take children into care? Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that authorities will receive a 100 per cent. reimbursement of those costs?

Why did the Secretary of State not wait for the outcome of the judicial review sought by the London boroughs of Westminster and Wandsworth—Tory flagships, I believe? What consideration has he given to the remarks of his former Cabinet colleague, the right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke), in his support for the Westminster application? Should not the Home Secretary accept amendments to the Asylum and Immigration Bill—currently in Committee—which gives the power to deny child benefit to hundreds of thousands of people who are lawfully settled in this country?

Why did not the Secretary of State accept the firm and overriding conclusion of his own Social Security Advisory Committee that the proposals should not be proceeded with? I assure the right hon. Gentleman that we shall continue to oppose them vigorously in debate, and ask him to confirm that he will honour the commitment to allow a full debate in the House before

[Mr. Keith Bradley]

the proposals are implemented. Opposition Members wish to ensure that we afford full protection to genuine asylum seekers.

Mr. Lilley: The Opposition's response reveals that they have not changed an iota. They still oppose every measure that is intended to ensure that money is put to good use, and goes to those who are genuinely entitled to it rather than those who are not.

The hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) said that the proposals were harsh. In many respects, however, they simply put asylum seekers on the same footing as British citizens, and endorse rules that have been endorsed by Labour Governments for British citizens. If the hon. Gentleman considers that harsh, he should have opposed his own Government.

The hon. Gentleman believes that the Labour party would support proper measures to deal with the problems, but has suggested no such measures, and no way of ensuring the making of savings and proper direction of the £200 million that will be saved. Labour has opposed every change and improvement in the treatment of asylum seekers made by the Government over the past 15 years.

The hon. Gentleman asked why I had said that more than 90 per cent. of claims were not from genuine refugees. That was the finding of Home Office investigations and the subsequent reviews carried out by judicial adjudicators. We grant exceptional leave to remain, but that does not mean that the people involved are refugees; such leave may be given for humanitarian reasons—because someone is ill, or has suffered a mishap since entering the country. A person may be allowed to remain here temporarily, although the circumstances—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) would do well to listen to my answer, rather than nattering on about matters that he manifestly does not understand. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman clearly does not understand the difference between exceptional leave to remain, granted by the Government—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The Minister is attempting to answer questions. If the hon. Member for Blackburn wishes to ask a question I shall look his way later.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Member for Blackburn does not know the difference between exceptional leave to remain and refugee status under the international United Nations convention, which is a different matter.

The hon. Member for Withington also asked why the original suggestion was that the regulations should come in on 8 January. That was the earliest date that they could be introduced, given the statutory consultation period. We said before the recess that we would allow time for debate, and time has been put aside for debate over the next 21 days, before the regulations come into force on 5 February. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would welcome that rather than showing a grudging attitude towards it.

The hon. Gentleman said that the distinction between those who claim at the port and those who claim subsequently within this country, having entered as visitors, tourists or business people and then changed their story, is artificial. Most of us think that if people have been asked at the port for their reasons for coming to the country and have said that they are coming here as tourists, business people, visitors or students, demonstrated that they have the means to support themselves during the period of their stay here, and accepted that they will not be a burden on public funds, but subsequently, after entry, change their story, albeit after talking to legal advisers who may suggest that they change it, it is not artificial to prevent them from being treated on the same basis as those who honestly arrive as refugees and claim at the port of entry.

I confirm that the long-term savings should be of the order of £200 million. Of course there will be an impact because of the transitional measures that we have announced, and the costs of helping local authorities remain to be determined. However, we do not think that those will be nearly as large as some alarmist suggestions would have us believe, because there will also be savings to local authorities because of the reduced flow of asylum seekers that will result from the discouraging effect on bogus claims of the measures that we have introduced.

It would have been foolish for us to wait until the end of the judicial review sought by Westminster council, because one of the reasons for the review was that the council did not know the outcome of the consultation process. We have now announced the outcome, and I believe that it will be satisfactory to boroughs in London and elsewhere that have problems in that respect. I believe that the measures in general show that we have thoroughly considered the representations made during the consultation period both by concerned lobbies and by local authorities, and have fully met the most serious concerns that they expressed.

None the less, the basic question remains: how could any Government not tackle a situation in which we are paying out more than £200 million, 90 per cent. of which goes to people who are subsequently found not to be genuine refugees?

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. After that initial Front-Bench exchange, which has taken about 20 minutes, I now insist on brisk questions and answers. If Members seek to put questions they must be brisk and to the point, and I want the answers likewise.

Sir Jim Lester (Broxtowe): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for the fact that the Government have considered the widespread concerns of many Conservative Members and of many other people. He has responded to those concerns by dealing with the worst situation that many of us envisaged, and I assure him that what he has done will be helpful, bearing in mind what we foresaw might have happened. I still believe that we should shorten the time taken for appeals, and I ask my right hon. Friend to re-examine the position of people who apply for asylum within a short time of coming into the country. I do not mean the people whom my right hon. Friend described, but there is evidence that many genuine asylum seekers apply within two weeks of arrival.

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support for the changes that we have introduced, as a result of discussions, not least those that I have had with him over the past few months. I believe that those changes meet the greatest concerns about the transitional period.

but I agree that we must do all in our power to shorten the time taken to assess claims and appeals. As for people who make claims within a short time after entering the country, close inspection of the figures shows that the case for a change is much weaker than some lobbyists have suggested. It would be difficult to make a change in such a way that it did not validate those who have entered the country with one story but have subsequently changed it, in a way that most people would not think should be a justification for receiving benefit. That is especially so in view of the fact that all such people will have demonstrated that they had the means to support themselves, and they should be held to that statement and that promise.

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): Is it right that persecuted people should now become homeless and destitute? A number of genuine asylum seekers who apply in-country have been tortured. Should not they be treated with compassion, and not kicked in the teeth? What assessment has the Secretary of State made of the number of children who will have to be taken into care under the Children Act? What will be the cost of that to the public purse? Will he guarantee that we will have a full debate on the matter on the Floor of the House? Will he take note of what his own advisory committee said and withdraw the regulations?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Lady's contribution was characteristically emotive and irresponsible. While this is an emotional subject, it is not a matter on which one should be emotive, which means stirring up unjustified emotion. Of course there is at present a burden on some local authorities and others who care for children, including children who are sent unaccompanied to this country. For the latter group, the changes that I have announced today will make no difference. There is no reason why there should be any increased cost as a result of these responsibilities, nor would local authorities be obliged to take children into care. They must only see that the children are cared for, as is presently the case.

Mr. Peter Brooke (City of London and Westminster, South): May I express my appreciation to my right hon. Friend for the manner in which he has responded to the representations that have been made to him? Does he accept that while the negotiations with the local authority associations are continuing, the devil will remain in the small print? Does he further accept that nothing could do more harm in terms of relations between the host community and asylum seekers than the cost simply being transferred to council tax payers?

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his support for the changes that we have introduced. I hope that they will meet the needs and concerns of boroughs and local authorities in areas where there are concentrations of asylum seekers. It will be important to get the details right, but we will be aiming to offer a significant contribution where there are additional unavoidable costs arising from the changes for local authorities. We have significantly reduced the extent of such costs by the transitional measures that I have announced.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): Does the Secretary of State recall the evidence given by anti-fraud officers which suggested that many of these claims were not made by asylum seekers—bogus or otherwise—but by gangs working the social security system? Will he report to the House on the steps he intends to take to counter such benefit fraud before the House votes on the regulations so that we can see the extent of claims that have arisen because of people wrongly claiming benefit?

Mr. Lilley: There can of course be cases of fraud of the type that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned, and we introduced fingerprinting to make that much more difficult. We believe that that has largely eliminated the problem. The amount concerned is a minute fraction of the hundreds of millions of pounds we are talking about today. That money is going to people who are genuinely from abroad but are not genuine asylum seekers and who have come here as economic migrants. I believe that it is right to tackle these problems. I remind the hon. Gentleman that his party strongly opposed the introduction of fingerprinting for asylum seekers, a measure which has enabled us to tackle and largely eliminate the very fraud to which he refers.

Sir Nicholas Scott (Chelsea): In terms of recompensing local authorities which have to bear the burden of expenditure resulting from both homelessness and the provisions of the Children Act, is it not the case that not only will authorities be recompensed for future expenditure but for backdated costs which they have already borne?

Mr. Lilley: I am not certain that there are any costs of the kind my right hon. Friend suggests, but he is a distinguished former Social Security Minister and I would not give a 100 per cent. guarantee on that. I shall certainly look at the point that he has made. We believe that the problem of people who would have lost benefit on the day the regulations came into force has been eliminated by the new transitional arrangements. Therefore, it is only to the extent that the problem is on-going that any costs can arise. We will be seeking to assess with local authorities the extent of additional and unavoidable costs arising from that.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Does the Secretary of State accept that the many hundreds of thousands of refugees and asylum seekers who were genuinely worried and frightened by his original proposals will be relieved at his partial backdown this afternoon? Will he take the opportunity to talk to his colleagues in the Home Office, and assure them that it is not too late to reconsider the Asylum and Immigration Bill? That legislation—like his original proposals for change in the regulations—is brutal, ill-thought-out and unworkable, and it will impact harshly on people who are resident in this country whose skins happen to be a different colour from his own.

Mr. Lilley: It is wrong of the hon. Lady to suggest that anything in the measures or in the Asylum and Immigration Bill is based on race or will treat people of different colour in any different way. Part of the problem that we face now is an upsurge in the flow of economic migrants from eastern Europe. That migration is hard to justify on any conceivable grounds of refugee status, and that is why we are tackling the problem.

I hope that the hon. Lady will withdraw her remarks and not seek to exacerbate tensions between communities. One of the intentions of good asylum control is to cement and harmonise those relations.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I thank my right hon. Friend for responding as he has, but could

[Sir Patrick Cormack]

he clarify one point in his statement? Did he say that he would remove the Secretary of State's discretionary powers? If that is the case, could he explain why?

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support. The proposal to which he refers gives a discretionary power to the Secretary of State, or those acting on his behalf, to give interim benefit payments in cases in which it is known that an individual has an entitlement to benefit, but the amount of the benefit has not yet been calculated. The way in which the rules are framed suggests that the Secretary of State may have discretion to give benefit where an appeal is going on, but it is not known whether the person has an entitlement to benefit. We are trying to eliminate that uncertainty so that only in cases in which entitlement to benefit, but not the amount, has been established can the Secretary of State authorise an interim payment to enable the person to get by.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I welcome the statement because it moves the line; however, it does not change the principle. The Secretary of State said that extra support would be made available to local authorities. Will the additional support be ring-fenced? If a local authority, for example, was spending at or above its standard spending assessment, would the additional support be on top of its SSA? It is in areas such as mine in the east end where this proposal will have its greatest impact.

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome for the changes, which is unique among Opposition Members. I have said that there will be discussions between my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and the local authorities about the treatment of local authorities. I hesitate to pre-empt any arcane implications that those discussions might have for the complex and, to me, nearly incomprehensible financial arrangements which exist for local authorities.

The intention, however, is to provide a significant degree of help in cases in which there is additional and unavoidable cost—which will be monitored and, by implication, measured ex post facto rather than doled out through the normal SSA system.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): May I welcome the transitional arrangements that my right hon. Friend has announced today? I welcome the fact that he proposes to continue allowing benefit to people who seek asylum when they first make UK landfall at a port of entry. Will he confirm to the House that his proposals are fully in accordance with international law on those points?

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support. I can confirm that we have taken full advice to ensure that what we do is in accordance with the letter and the spirit of international law.

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): I welcome the Minister's change of heart in relation to some of the regulations, but he has not gone far enough. Will he take this opportunity to make a public apology to those asylum seekers in my constituency who were written to by officials in his Department before Christmas to tell them, illegally, that their benefits would be withdrawn on 8 January? He has written to me about it but has not made a public statement. Could he do so and also say what will happen to asylum seekers whose appeals have been turned down and who are waiting to leave the country? How will they live and what is going to be done with those people and their children?

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome for the changes. They are not, of course, in any way a reversal, but to avoid an upsurge of claims it was essential to announce, as we did, the impact that would be made by the changes on those who made claims in the interim. That has served its purpose. It is now possible the amend the regulations to ensure that there is no withdrawal of benefit from anybody when they come into force.

As for the issue about which I have written to the hon. Gentleman, where people were prematurely given an indication of the date on which the regulations might have come into force, I am glad that he has made his letter public. Our regret that that premature statement was made is therefore already in the public domain. Of course, it was essential at some stage that people knew what the arrangements would be.

The hon. Gentleman asked what would happen at the end of the appeal stage when, having exhausted all their appeal rights, people are found not to be genuine claimants. At present, they lose the right to benefit and the right to work in this country. There will be no change in that. Of course, once they are found, having exhausted all appeal rights, not to be refugees and if they are not given exceptional leave to remain, they will be expected to return to their own countries.

Mr. Nicholas Baker (North Dorset): Does my right hon. Friend accept that our international obligations, as well as our duty to genuine refugees, demand that we reduce the magnet that the benefits and jobs available in this country currently provide? Is he aware that he will have the tacit support and understanding of many Government Ministers in African countries for doing precisely that? Is he aware that the current rising tide of unfounded applications for asylum is threatening good race relations in this country?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend's experience in this area gives authority to what he has just said and I entirely endorse it. The measures that we have taken are absolutely right and it would be grossly irresponsible, as the Opposition's position is grossly irresponsible, not to make any changes either to the asylum procedures under the Asylum and Immigration Bill or on the benefits side. They are effectively allowing thousands and thousands of people with unfounded asylum claims to block up the procedures and affecting those with genuine claims. We should put those with genuine claims first.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): The Secretary of State said that by taking away benefits while someone is waiting for an appeal, he is merely putting them on a par with any other person waiting for an appeal. Does he not understand that asylum seekers who wait for appeals may be without money for several months and may be forced, if they have no friends to support them, to go back to where they came from? People who might well have won appeals may end up going back to countries where they are in danger of being persecuted. Could he give an example of someone else waiting for an appeal who would be under the same sort of pressure?

Mr. Lilley: I endeavoured to explain to the House that the rules will be effectively identical for both British

citizens and asylum seekers. No other means of support is made available for people whose claims for income support, say, are rejected during the period in which they appeal against such decisions. I remind the hon. Gentleman that, in the case of asylum seekers, 96 per cent. of appeals are finally rejected.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that nine out of 10 applications for asylum are ultimately turned down and that those people have been costing the country some £200 million? If that is the case, my constituents welcome the decision that he has announced today.

Mr. Lilley: I can confirm the figures that my hon. Friend has given. As he knows, the Opposition have pretended recently to be against the abuse of the welfare system. Of the benefits that go to domestic claimants, the most vulnerable benefits are subject to some 10 per cent. abuse, but at least 90 per cent. gets through to those who are genuinely entitled to it. In the case of benefits for asylum seekers, the proportions are reversed, yet the Labour party wants that position to remain unchanged.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Does the Secretary of State believe that no child will end up in care as a result of his disgraceful statement? If he does not, will he estimate how many children will end up in care?

Mr. Lilley: I have tried to explain that no change that I have announced today will affect the most heart-rending cases where children are sent to this country unaccompanied. As for children accompanied by families, it is open to local authorities to help the family look after its children. Local authorities are not required to take the children into care.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that his response on transitional relief, which will be warmly welcomed by any reasonable person, represents a response to the most persuasive evidence that was given in public to the Social Security Select Committee inquiry into this matter? Is not the lesson to be learnt that he has responded fully to those concerns because they were factually based, and those people who feel that they have not been responded to should think again about the emotive language and exaggeration that they use in putting forward their case?

Mr. Lilley: I entirely endorse the points that my hon. Friend has made, which are given greater authority by the fact that he has been chairing the sub-committee of the Select Committee investigating that matter. I naturally look forward to receiving his report as soon as it is available.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): If the evidence for those changes is so overwhelming, why did the Secretary of State's adviser, the Social Security Advisory Committee, in an unprecedented statement, say that it wanted the draft regulations completely withdrawn?

Mr. Lilley: It is far from unprecedented that the Social Security Advisory Committee, whose job is to consider and receive all the representations made following the Government's announcement of proposals for social security, should say that a proposal should be withdrawn. Those proposals invariably generate hostile representations. I have often been told to withdraw proposals before I have responded to the most serious and poignant concerns that they raise. I remind the hon. Lady, however, that almost every other country in Europe has tightened up either on its procedures or benefits, or both. It is extraordinary that the Labour party should think that this country should take an ever-rising proportion of asylum claimants in western Europe. The number that we take has already quadrupled and the Labour party clearly wants our share to go up even more.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): May I anticipate the response of the church leaders in south-east London and say on their behalf that they will be grateful that the transitional arrangements have been modified? However, there remains the problem of the children of people who are unauthorised to be here but who have been here for more than five years, who are then sent away. This may be a Home Office issue. The real test is that people who come from abroad and change their stories will no longer be able to get the benefits that are denied to people in this country, who may be in an even worse position.

Mr. Lilley: I very much welcome the points that my hon. Friend made. He is right to say that there is a clear distinction between people who come to this country as refugees precisely because they trust this country and declare their claim for asylum at the port of entry, and those who tell the immigration authorities one story but subsequently change their story once they are in the country, having received advice that it may be in their interest and help to get benefits.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the underlying principles of his draft order are totally unchanged and that it will simply happen further along the line? While those whose asylum applications have been refused legitimately wait for an appeal to have their cases reconsidered, they will be forced into destitution. The Secretary of State intended that to happen on 8 January but has been forced to put it back by a month.

Mr. Lilley: I do not often agree with the hon. Gentleman, but I respect his continuing concern about this issue and the consistency of his line on asylum seekers. He is right to say that, essentially, the change in the transitional arrangements means that no one will have benefit withdrawn on the day that the regulations come in but if, in future, they are found not to be genuine asylum seekers, they will lose benefit at that point. That seems reasonable and sensible, although alas it may not to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): May I, as the Member who has the principal port of entry to the United Kingdom, Heathrow, in his borough, warmly commend my right hon. Friend for his clarity of mind, consistency of purpose and courage in tackling what, to my constituents, is obviously an abuse, which enables public funds to be disbursed to their disbenefit? May I also say that it is important, as local authority representatives from Hillingdon have made clear to the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford), that something be done to provide funding to accommodate the unaccompanied refugee children who continue to pour in through Heathrow?

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who rightly has specific constituency concerns about that issue.

[Mr. Lilley]

I am glad that he welcomes the measures that we have introduced. I will convey the final argument that he made to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, but I believe that the changes that we have announced will mean that local authorities, and people with genuine anxieties about the transitional arrangements, have their concerns properly met. Like my hon. Friend, I believe that the vast majority of people in this country, whatever their colour or ethnic origin, will support those measures.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): If these proposals are not withdrawn in their entirety, there will undoubtedly be additional responsibilities for all local authorities under the Housing Act 1985 and the Children Act. Will the Secretary of State give a figure for the amount of transitional relief and the length of time that that will run? My local authority, Camden, expects to be confronted with an increase of £4.6 million.

Mr. Lilley: I said in my statement that we would seek to help local authorities that have unavoidable additional expenditures. We believe that those expenditures will be far less than the number that the hon. Lady quoted, which ante-dates the change in the transitional arrangements, which has relieved local authorities of the prospect of the biggest potential impact on their budgets.

When the hon. Lady speaks about removing those measures in their entirety, she is saying that we should continue to spend £200 million, the vast bulk of it going to people who will be found not to be genuine asylum seekers. Where else in the welfare budget or the tax system do she and the Labour party propose to obtain £200 million? Will it come from genuine domestic claimants in order to be given to bogus asylum seekers?

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the widespread abuse of our social security system by bogus asylum seekers is widely resented in this country and is bad for good community relations? In that context, is it not significant that Amnesty International has identified abuse of the asylum system as a significant and difficult problem, not only because of its effects on the taxpayer but because of the way in which it discriminates indirectly against genuine asylum seekers?

Mr. Lilley: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. He is right to quote Amnesty International, which did say that that is a genuine problem and, in so doing, rebutted effectively the arguments of Opposition Front Bench Members, who have tried to pretend that it is a non-problem.

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North-East): The Secretary of State knows that the Social Security Advisory Committee, which he appointed, has recommended to him that the proposals that he made should not only be abandoned, but scrapped. Given that he appointed that committee and that the report's recommendation about asylum seekers is perfectly explicit, why has he rejected its recommendations?

Mr. Lilley: I am not sure about the fine distinction between abandoning and scrapping, but the reason why I have done what I have done is that, having considered the representations that the Social Security Advisory Committee had received and relayed to me, I believed that the most sensitive issue was that of transitional problems—the possibility of sudden withdrawal of benefit from a large number of people. It was necessary to create that prospect to prevent an upsurge of claims and, having served its purpose, it was reasonable to change that measure in that respect. I have listened to what the committee has said and to what the local authorities, which we have also consulted, have said and I have produced, I believe, a package that most sensible people would consider to be both fair and essential.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): May I associate myself with the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson)? Is my right hon. Friend aware of the housing difficulties in the London borough of Ealing and other boroughs near to Heathrow airport, where, in a recent year, the entire new housing supply had to go to asylum seekers? Has he any plans to ensure that there is a greater dispersal of asylum seekers and appeals so that people on the housing list in Ealing and other boroughs who have been there for months and years are not pushed out of the queue unfairly?

Mr. Lilley: I understand my hon. Friend's concerns. There are certainly no powers at the Government's disposal or within the regulations to determine where people live when they have the right to live in this country. But it creates problems when an extra 50,000 people a year come to this country, the vast majority of whom are not escaping persecution, but seeking economic betterment. The amount of extra housing, schools and facilities that those additional numbers require in this country is over and above the £200 million in benefit costs to which I referred.

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): I have received letters from a large number of constituents who are outraged at the Secretary of State's proposals, which are still unchanged apart from the transitional period. Why does he continue to make the fatuous analogy between those appealing against the refusal of benefit and those appealing against the refusal of asylum? Even right-wing Conservatives should feel slightly uneasy at the prospect of a large number of genuine asylum seekers—even according to the Government's figures—no longer having the means to apply or appeal.

Mr. Lilley: I am astonished that the hon. Gentleman cannot see the similarity between an asylum seeker appealing against a decision that deprives him of benefit and a British person appealing against a decision that deprives him of benefit. I do not discriminate between those who come from abroad and British citizens, and do not think that we should do so in the benefit system.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Does my right hon. Friend accept that his statement will be warmly welcomed by the vast majority of people in this country who want Britain to be a safe haven for genuine asylum seekers, but not a soft touch for economic migrants? Will he confirm that the rate of application for asylum in 1995 of 40,000 a year was equivalent to 200,000 applications in a five-year Parliament, and that no Government of any political persuasion could have done anything but take action?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In fact, the position is even more daunting than he suggests because the number of claims is rising rapidly and might

continue to rise if the changes that we are making, both in the regulations and the Asylum and Immigration Bill, do not go through. We cannot assume that the level of claims will settle at 50,000 a year; it may continue to rise. This country's share of total claims for asylum made in Europe has risen from about 4 per cent. a decade ago to 13 per cent., and is set to go on rising if we do nothing to bring our system more in line with those of our continental partners.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Throughout the statement the Minister excluded people who are in the United Kingdom with exceptional leave to remain from falling within the "genuine" category. Does he not think that in doing so he does them a disservice and that it would have been better to have told the House that, even according to his figures, the percentage was 75 per cent. rather than 90 per cent.? Does he accept that, as the figure represents just 0.25 per cent. of his Department's entire budget, he has turned a molehill into a legislative mountain? Many in the House will wish to vote against the regulations, so will he say whether there will be a debate on the Floor of the House or in an obscure Committee Room? Will we all have the chance to vote on the proposals? Will they be placed before Parliament in its total authority?

Mr. Lilley: The simple fact is that anyone receiving exceptional leave to remain will first have been found by the authorities not to be a genuine asylum seeker. I do not see why I should give a different verdict from that given by officials who have considered the case in the light of the official definitions of refugees. Those people may encounter mishaps; they may come here from a country where there is no persecution and their claim may be heard. They may be sick and we may decide, for humanitarian purposes, to allow them to stay for a while. But that does not make them genuine refugees fleeing from political persecution and we should not present them as such. Where does the Liberal party propose to obtain £200 million from within the welfare budget? Would it take it from pensioners? One per cent. off pensions would be a small figure in the hon. Gentleman's terms and would finance the continued existence of unwarranted benefits for people who are not genuine refugees.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is conceivable that the Government would have been censored by the Audit Commission had they not taken measures to prevent the abuse of £200 million in the social security system? Does he further agree that the measure is likely to improve race relations because the last thing that genuine asylum seekers and immigrants want is people falsely using the system in that way?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We could well be open to investigation by the Audit Office or the Public Accounts Committee if we continued a system in which a high portion of benefit expenditure went to those subsequently found not to fulfil the conditions for which it was intended. In those circumstances, it is only right that we should act responsibly. I do not want to wait until I am censored before I act. That seems to be the attitude of the Opposition.

Business of the House

4.25 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): Will the Leader of the House make a statement about the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 15 JANUARY—Second Reading of the Finance Bill.

TUESDAY 16 JANUARY—Opposition day (1st allotted day). Until about 7 o'clock there will be a debate entitled, "The threat to the BBC World Service", followed by a debate entitled "Cuts in the training budget and the abandonment of the Community Action programme". Both debates will arise on Opposition motions.

WEDNESDAY 17 JANUARY—Until 2 o'clock there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Until 7 o'clock there will be motions on the Employer's Contributions Reimbursement Regulations, Housing Benefit, Supply of Information and Council Tax Benefit (Amendment) Regulations, Income Support (General) (Jobseeker's Allowance Consequential Amendments) Regulations, the Jobseeker's Allowance Regulations and the Social Security (Back to Work Bonus) Regulations.

Remaining stages of the Education (Student Loans) Bill.

Motion on the Potato Marketing Scheme (Commencement of Revocation Period) Order.

THURSDAY 18 JANUARY—Debate on the Army on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 19 JANUARY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 22 JANUARY—Second Reading of the Nursery Education and Grant-maintained Schools Bill.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committee B will meet at 10.30 am on Wednesday 17 January to consider European Community documents Nos. A4-0102/95; SEC(95)731; CM 2866; and two unnumbered reports relating to the operation of the treaty on European Union and the unnumbered explanatory memorandum submitted by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 8 December 1995 relating to the report of the study group preparing for the 1996 intergovernmental conference.

[Wednesday 17 January:

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community documents: (a) A4-0102/95, Resolution of the European Parliament on the functioning of the Treaty on European Union; (b) CM 2866, Report of the Council on the functioning of the Treaty on European Union; (c) SEC(95)731, Report by the Commission on the operation of the Treaty on European Union; (d) Unnumbered, Report by the Court of Auditors on the operation of the Treaty on European Union; (e) Unnumbered, Report of the Court of Justice on certain aspects of the application of the Treaty on European Union; and (f) Unnumbered, Report of the Study Group preparing for the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference. Relevant reports of the European Legislation Committee:

[Mr. Tony Newton]

(a) HC 70-xix (1994-95) and HC 239-I (1994-95); (b) HC 70-xix (1994-95) and HC 239-I (1994-95); (c) HC 70-xix (1994-95) and HC 239-I (1994-95); (d) HC 239-I (1994-95); (e) HC 239-I (1994-95); (f) HC 51-v (1995-96).]

I am not yet able to give details of the business for the following three days, but I expect to provide for an Opposition day and that Government business will be taken on Thursday 25 January. On Friday 26 January, the business will be private Members' Bills.

Mrs. Taylor: I thank the Leader of the House for that statement. He was present during the previous statement by the Secretary of State for Social Security on the asylum seekers benefit regulations. During questioning, the Secretary of State said that time had been set aside for a debate on those regulations. As those regulations were laid today and prayed against today, can the Leader of the House let us know when that debate will take place?

The Leader of the House announced a debate on Thursday on the Army. He will be aware of the widespread disquiet on both sides of the House that the Government are considering buying military ambulances from Austria, when British-built ones are available which represent better value for money, are preferred by the armed forces and are interoperable with those in other NATO countries. Will the Leader of the House ensure that Ministers explain their current thinking about the matter in the debate on Thursday? Will he also make sure that Ministers reach no final decisions about the issue until hon. Members have the chance to debate it in the House on Thursday, because it is so important to so many people?

Secondly, the Leader of the House must be aware of the depth of public concern and fear about the pressures that are facing hospital accident and emergency services. The subject was raised during Prime Minister's questions today and I thought that the Deputy Prime Minister was amazingly complacent about the whole issue. We hear almost daily about dangerously ill patients who have been driven around the country or who have been flown by helicopter to other parts of the country in order to find intensive care beds. Those incidents have sometimes had fatal consequences.

Will the Leader of the House be more reasonable than the Deputy Prime Minister in his approach to the issue, and will he acknowledge that our constituents are genuinely and deeply concerned about it? Will he ensure that there is a debate in Government time about the very responsible, if alarming, British Medical Association report, which was published today?

Finally, is the Leader of the House aware that yesterday the Select Committee on European Legislation recommended that five directives should be debated together on the Floor of the House because of their interrelationship and their intrinsic importance? Given the Select Committee's many previous requests that issues be debated on the Floor of the House—most notably its recommendations relating to European Union enlargement—and given that many of those recommendations have been ignored, will the Leader of the House ensure that the Committee's unanimous recommendation is upheld and that the items on economic and monetary union, convergence and social protection are debated on the Floor of the House as soon as possible? The British public will not understand if the Government prevent debate in Parliament on fundamental issues of that kind before the intergovernmental conference.

Mr. Newton: Perhaps I may take the hon. Lady's questions in reverse order. First, I have not had an opportunity to study the recommendations of the Select Committee on European Legislation, and I do not wish to respond until I do so. However, I shall take note of the hon. Lady's representations, along with any that the Select Committee has made.

Secondly, as to the hon. Lady's point about accident and emergency departments, I was present during the exchanges with my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister during Prime Minister's questions and I thought that he was entirely reasonable about the matter. He explained very carefully the action that the Government are taking. I have no plans to provide for a debate on the subject in Government time, but I have said that, apart from the Opposition time that I am providing next week, I also anticipate providing Opposition time in the week after that.

Thirdly, the hon. Lady put her points about the Army ambulance in the context of the debate on Thursday 18 January. I think that the correct course is for me to bring her remarks to the attention of the Minister to whom they were indirectly directed.

Lastly, with regard to the asylum seekers regulations, I have said before that I expect to provide time for debate on the Floor of the House in response to a prayer of the kind that I understand has been laid. I cannot yet give an exact time and date for that debate, but the House will remember that I was not able to give details of business on the three middle days of the week after next.

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): Is it not a tradition of Parliament that the most important and controversial Bills start their lives in this place? If that is the case, why was the Broadcasting Bill—which, by any stretch of the imagination, is both a major and an important Bill—introduced in the other place?

Mr. Newton: I do not think that the convention is quite as clear cut as my right hon. Friend suggests—although certain Bills with particular characteristics would normally begin in the House of Commons. However, we must make a judgment about the balance of legislation between the two Houses when considering the pattern of any parliamentary year and we took all the relevant factors into account.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): May I return to the important question of social security statutory instruments in relation to asylum seekers? I heard clearly what the Leader of the House said, but he must surely acknowledge that there is exceptional interest in those regulations. Reports are being prepared by the Select Committee on Social Security and by the Commission for Racial Equality, and we have just been able to read the Social Security Advisory Committee's report.

I should like to press the Leader of the House on what he has just said, because he implied that there was a real likelihood of a debate in the last week of January. Will the right hon. Gentleman also consider the fact that one and a half hours may not be enough for such an important matter?

Mr. Newton: I do not think that I can add to what I have just said, except that, of course, arrangements for such

debates are normally subject to discussion through the usual channels, in which the hon. Gentleman plays his part.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): May I refer my right hon. Friend to the deliberations of European Standing Committee B on Wednesday next week? He has been good enough to cite the documents that could be relevant to the discussions on the European Union treaty and the forthcoming IGC. However, is not the most important document—a prerequisite for a meaningful debate—a White Paper from the Government? In a White Paper, the Government could lay down clearly the principles on which they intend to negotiate.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will, I am sure, have heard what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said on that matter earlier this week. I am not able to add to that at the moment.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): May we have a guarantee that next week Cabinet Ministers will be here to answer questions? In the past week, after a fortnight's recess, we have found that, on Tuesday, the Defence Secretary was gallivanting around Japan instead of being here; on Wednesday, the Foreign Secretary was up the wall in China; and today, the Chancellor of the Exchequer is nowhere to be found. I make no case against the Prime Minister because we know what he is doing today. I am beginning to wonder whether those Cabinet Ministers were told to keep away from the House of Commons this week, in advance of Lady Thatcher's speech, so as not to put their foot in it.

Mr. Newton: Well, I am here answering questions, even if they are not very good.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): May I thank my right hon. Friend for arranging the debate on the Second Reading of the Nursery Education and Grant-maintained Schools Bill? Will I be in order during that debate if I refer to the activities of the Labour and Liberal-controlled Barnet council? Before a recent ballot at Christ's college, which my son attends, the headmaster was threatened that if the parents voted for grant-maintained status, necessary repairs to the school roof would be cancelled. After the ballot, the leader of the Labour-controlled council told the headmaster that he should consider resigning. Is not that more like the thought police of Ceausescu's Romania than the traditions of a liberal democracy in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Newton: I hope that my hon. Friend is right in thinking that those matters would be in order during the debate to which he referred. I know from my own experience that there is a growing number of those disturbing stories, and they are not confined to Barnet.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Will the Leader of the House reconsider the request for a debate on the crisis in beds in the national health service? Is he aware that all of us face the results of that crisis? At the moment, I am investigating the case of a woman who was removed from the intensive care unit in Halifax. Even though she was given only a 50:50 chance of surviving, she was taken on a two-hour, nightmare journey to Manchester to an intensive care bed there. She was moved because her bed in Halifax was needed for somebody in an even worse state. Does not the Leader of the House realise that there is a crisis facing the NHS because of the massive bed closures, especially in accident and emergency and intensive care units?

Mr. Newton: I am sure that the hon. Lady does not expect me to comment on an individual case from the Dispatch Box.

Mrs. Mahon: We should have a debate, though.

Mr. Newton: I understand that, but I felt that I should make my first point.

On the hon. Lady's other points, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister put the position in a sensible and balanced way earlier.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): May we have a debate next week on voting arrangements in the House? During that debate, we could consider carefully the circumstances of the vote yesterday afternoon, when we rejected a Liberal Democrat ten-minute Bill. Part of the reason for the defeat of the Bill was the absence of the new Liberal Democrat, the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Miss Nicholson), who did not turn up to support her colleagues, any more than she did the previous night.

Mr. Newton: A [illegible]esting point, but not, I think, one that would lead me to arrange for a debate in Government time.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I offer my party's support for the request about Army ambulances.

Would it be possible—if not in the coming week, then in the week in which there still seems to be some time—to have a debate on hospital reorganisation in Northern Ireland? The need arises not just because of today's statement about the amalgamation work in Belfast, but because of the resignations of two distinguished chairmen of trusts and the chief executive of a trust.

Mr. Newton: I note the hon. Gentleman's support for the point about Army ambulances—as, I am sure, will my colleagues in the Ministry of Defence.

I think I had better admit straightforwardly that a debate on hospital reorganisation in Northern Ireland was not among the items on my list for the three days to which the hon. Gentleman refers. The subject seems to me perhaps an appropriate one for a Wednesday morning. The hon. Gentleman might like to bear that in mind.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Will my right hon. Friend consider a debate on the new concept of a stakeholder society being proposed by the Labour party? Does he agree that the time has now come when it should be clearly spelt out who these stakeholders are? Are they trade unionists, pressure groups and community groups telling bosses how to run their businesses? Would not such an idea crush businesses when what we want to do is allow them to prosper?

Mr. Newton: As far as I can see, through the miasma of uncertainty surrounding what this is supposed to mean, the answer to my hon. Friend's question is that she is right.

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): Does the Leader of the House recall that just before Christmas I raised with him the concern in Leicester about the Government's

[Mr. Jim Marshall]

failure to lay the order conferring unitary status on that city? He will probably know that that fear has not been allayed in the interim. Can he announce the date for the order to be laid; failing that, can he give us a reason why the delay is occurring in the first place?

Mr. Newton: I am not in a position even now to give the hon. Gentleman an instant response, but I shall try to ensure that I communicate with him further before the next business questions.

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the effectiveness of prison in deterring crime and discouraging criminality? That would provide an opportunity to discuss the case of my constituent, Helen Wallace, who was reported in the *Worcester Evening News* yesterday as saying that she is a reformed drug dealer now because of her experience in prison. Her mother prayed that she would go to prison, and she says that it was right that she should go there. She says that she will not go back to drug dealing because she does not want to go back to prison. Such a debate would show which party is really tough on the causes of crime.

Mr. Newton: There have been a number of opportunities in the past few months for such debates. I cannot promise an immediate further opportunity, but I can certainly undertake to draw that powerful point to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): It would appear from the reply that the Deputy Prime Minister gave earlier that he has not read or understood today's statement by the British Medical Association. Is the Leader of the House aware that the BMA places the responsibility for the present crisis not just on the shortage of finance and beds but on the perverse operational effects of the internal market, the Government's distortion of clinical priorities through their waiting list initiative, and the failure of the community care programme, which is blocking beds? In short, the BMA says that the Government are responsible.

May I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to early-day motion 248?

[*That this House notes with concern that the Greenwich Healthcare NHS Trust cancelled 26 elective non-urgent surgical admissions during the weekend 6th-7th January, that a further eight admissions were cancelled on 8th January and that all non-urgent elective surgery has now been postponed for at least seven days; further notes that the Greenwich Healthcare Trust has experienced a loss of 120 acute beds amounting to 16.37 per cent. of the total between 1993-94 and 1994-95; believes that this pattern is common to other areas of London and shows that London is both under-bedded and under-resourced; and calls upon the Secretary of State to set up an independent inquiry into bed needs and availability in London and an immediate moratorium on hospital and bed closures.*]

The motion points out that the healthcare trust in my district has had to cancel all elective, non-urgent surgery as a result of the current crisis. Will the right hon. Gentleman reconsider the request from many hon. Members for a debate on the crisis in the health service to be held as soon as possible?

Mr. Newton: If the hon. Gentleman reads *Hansard* when it is published, he will find that the Deputy Prime Minister's comments touched on many of the points that he has just mentioned. I understand that the BMA chairman also said that it is

"largely a matter of making the most effective use of the resources we've got."

That is the whole thrust of the Government's policy.

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): The whole House will welcome the announcement of a debate on the future of the BBC World Service, given the widespread feeling that that most precious of national assets is being sold short as a result of cuts in the Foreign Office budget. Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure, however, the presence at that debate of the Secretary of State for National Heritage, who has overall responsibility for the BBC, so that she can give us answers about the inquiry that must be going on into the repeated blackouts of the BBC World Service's Arabic television news broadcasts to the middle east? The interruptions appear to have been caused by Orbit Communications, the company in Rome with which the BBC has a contract and which turns out to be owned by a prince of the Saudi royal family, a cousin of King Fahd. We shall also want an explanation of why the BBC's precious editorial independence has been sold to a family like that.

Mr. Newton: Without accepting the generality of the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the position of the World Service, which will no doubt be extensively canvassed in next week's debate, I shall of course draw the more specific part of his question to the attention of the Heritage Secretary.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Thank you for calling me, Madam Speaker. I hope that you have noticed that the usual suspects are here on a Thursday evening.

Madam Speaker: I have.

Mr. Banks: Thank you. May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 260?

[*That this House expresses concern at the appointment of Sir Christopher Bland, a well-known Tory party supporter, as the new Chairman of the BBC; believes that the political impartiality and independence of the BBC is compromised by the appointment of someone who has held senior elected office for the Tories and who is clearly a political appointee; and calls for an open, competitive system of appointment for such positions of national significance in order to ensure widespread public support and an end to the use of cronyism by a discredited and exhausted Government anxious to secure placemen in institutions such as the BBC before defeat at the coming General Election.*]

The motion concerns the appointment of Sir Christopher Bland as the new chairman of the BBC. I remember him from his days as a Tory member of the Greater London council. Can the right hon. Gentleman imagine the outrage that there would be among Tory Members if an overtly Labour politician had been appointed to such a senior position?

May we have a debate on the method of selection of senior figures for these important public institutions, so that the public can be certain that the appointments are genuinely independent and politically impartial, not just filled by placemen of the Government?

Mr. Newton: If one thing is clear about this appointment, it is that it was in no way the appointment of a politician to do the job. Sir Christopher has wide experience of the broadcasting industry and a considerable understanding of the business, financial and technical issues facing the BBC. That appears to me to have been widely accepted by those who comment on those matters in the public prints.

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): May I echo the points made by the shadow Leader of the House about the relevance of the military ambulances issue to next week's debate on the Army? I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to the growing concern on both sides of the House about the fact that the Government are even considering placing a contract with an Austrian company when British-built military ambulances are available to meet the Ministry of Defence's quality and cost-effectiveness specifications. When drawing those matters to the attention of the Secretary of State for Defence next week, will the right hon. Gentleman emphasise to him the strength of feeling on both sides of the House—amplified in two early-day motions signed by a growing number of hon. Members of all parties?

Mr. Newton: I take the hon. Gentleman's question to be: will I add his name to the list of those who have expressed their concern and draw it to the attention of the Defence Secretary? The answer to that is yes.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): May we have an early debate on the barbaric practice of shackling pregnant women prisoners? The Government's response on Tuesday to a private notice question on that issue led the House to believe that staff at Whittington hospital in my constituency, where the women are taken to give birth and to be treated, view such practices with equanimity. Yet a report in today's newspaper states that Baroness Hayman, chair of the Whittington trust, has written to Baroness Cumberlege asking for an early meeting and expressing grave professional concern at such practices.

Two issues seem to be at stake: first, the possibility that the House may have been misled; and secondly, the fact that that barbaric and inhumane practice still continues. The sooner we have a full debate and get the matter out in the open and the practice abandoned, the better.

Mr. Newton: I cannot of course add to what my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office said in her statement in response to the private notice question on Tuesday, but I will bring the hon. Lady's comments to her attention and bear in mind her request.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Will the Leader of the House reflect on the fact that, over a year, we have general debates in Government time on Wales, Scotland and Greater London, yet outside Greater London in the south-east of England, there are some 13 million people? I hope and ask that he will agree with one thing: to a large extent, that will be the battleground of the next general election. Is there not an overwhelming case for the Government to have a debate in which they could defend—I assume that they would want to do so robustly—their stewardship of the interests of the people of the south-east of England? In such a debate, my hon. Friends and I could attack the Government and Members of Parliament in marginal seats around the M25 in Hertfordshire, Kent and Essex for their defence of a Government who have caused enormous problems to people in terms of negative equity, anxiety about the national health service and lack of mobility on public transport. Let us have a debate—a gladitorial contest—on the Floor of the House, in which we could attack the Government for their stewardship of the south-east of England and in which Ministers could try to defend their position.

Mr. Newton: According to my observations over a long period, confirmed this afternoon, the hon. Gentleman is not short of opportunities to make his points without me staging further debates. As to the rest, the Government would defend their record robustly, not only on the south-east, but on the whole of the United Kingdom.

Orders of the Day

Rating (Caravans and Boats) Bill

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Clause 1

CARAVANS AND BOATS OCCUPIED AS SOLE OR MAIN RESIDENCE

Amendment made: No. 1, in page 1, line 24, leave out subsection (5) and insert—

'( ) Subsection (4) does not apply in relation to a hereditament where—

(a) a proposal for the alteration of a local non-domestic rating list in respect of the hereditament has been made, and not withdrawn, before 30th January 1995 in accordance with regulations under section 55 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988,

(b) the ground for the proposal was that the list was inaccurate because the hereditament ought not to be shown in the list or, in the case of a composite hereditament, the rateable value shown in the list was too high, and

(c) the reason or one of the reasons given in the proposal, or on an appeal (in accordance with those regulations) to a tribunal against a refusal to make the proposed alteration, for the list being inaccurate was that any pitch occupied by a caravan or (as the case may be) mooring occupied by a boat was domestic property by virtue of section 66(1)(a) or (b) of that Act'.—*[Sir Paul Beresford.]*

Order for Third Reading read.—[*Queen's consent signified.*]

4.51 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

First, I am grateful to hon. Members for accepting the amendment. I understand that residential boat owners have some concerns about the way in which local taxation affects them. Those concerns seem primarily to be about the council tax and are outside the Bill's scope, but once we have had full details of their concerns, we shall consider them carefully.

The Bill returns the law on the rating of pitches for caravans and of moorings for boats to what we had always intended it to be. Unless the Bill is enacted, most caravan and boat owners will face higher local tax bills. I commend the Bill, as amended, to the House.

4.52 pm

Ms Hilary Armstrong (North-West Durham): I shall be as brief as the Minister, whom I thank for the commitment to consider the case that the Residential Boat Owners Association is making. Those people are concerned that the Bill, although not directly affecting the owners' council tax problem, will make it more difficult for them to advance their arguments. That is why they were worried that the Bill was going through without their involvement. I am therefore grateful to the Minister for agreeing that their concerns will be considered.

As the Minister said, the Bill restores the position to that which we all thought it was until a valuation tribunal decision. I know that not only many caravan and boat owners, but local authorities will be relieved. They are having enough problems in sorting out council tax issues for this year. The thought that they would have to go back three years to recover money and to repay other moneys did not fill them with great joy.

Therefore, it is in everyone's interests that the Bill receives a speedy passage. I thank the Minister for acknowledging the point that the Residential Boat Owners Association has been making and I look forward to its concerns being dealt with.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Business Links

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Streeter.]*

4.54 pm

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Energy (Mr. Richard Page): There is a belief in some quarters that it is easier to run a small business than a big one—it is thought that the bigger the company, the more the problems and the more the difficulties. There is nothing further from the truth. The small business man or woman must be an expert at absolutely everything. They must be knowledgeable when the Health and Safety Executive official appears; they must have tax information at their fingertips when the Inland Revenue inspector knocks; they must be skilled in the details of value added tax when the VAT man calls. They must work through the many layers of officialdom that are needed to run a complex society, and let us not forget that that business man or woman has not yet got around to running his or her business.

Another range of skills is needed: to be skilled in design to produce an attractive product; to be a purchasing agent and to ensure that the raw materials are bought at the best price; to be a production engineer to ensure that the assembly line works effectively and that goods are made to price and quality; and, of course, to be a financial wizard to ensure that the cash flow is under control and that the bank manager is kept happy.

Having done all that, the business man or woman has not even got around to selling anything yet, which is the whole object of the exercise and where another raft of skills is needed: in marketing, sales and, again, in credit control. By contrast, a manager in a large company has a simple life. He can monitor the overall scene and subcontract in and out where necessary, when he thinks that he needs expert advice. Who could possibly believe that running a small business is easy? I do not and the Government do not, which is why, over the years, there has been sympathy from and appreciation by the Government for the work undertaken by the small business sector.

The best thing that any Government can do for a business man or woman is to provide a stable, solid economic environment of low taxation, low interest rates and low inflation—that is what the Government are delivering for the small business sector. Added to that, for the first time we are providing stable exchange rates. I know from hard personal experience that small business is more affected by the swings and changes of inflation and interest rates than large ones, which have the capability to hedge. Small businesses do not have the resources to protect themselves against such future changes. That is why, as I said, the best service that any Government can give to the small business sector is a stable economy.

Of course, having said that, it is too easy to forget what, over the years, we have done for the small business sector: small companies' corporation tax rate has been reduced from 42 to 24 per cent.; simplified accounts procedures for very small firms have been introduced; tax rules for the self-employed have been simplified; inheritance tax has been reformed; VAT thresholds have been increased. I could go on. There is, however, more to it than that.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): To be entirely honest, should not the Minister also mention that small businesses and medium-sized enterprises did not want a three-year recession after the 1992 election, which hit so many small businesses and sent them into liquidation?

Mr. Page: Obviously no business wants a recession, but it does want to have a sensible recovery. For the first time for years, the Government have got us out of the boom-bust cycle—vast growth and vast inflation, which then go back down again. Each time we came out of recovery, we found ourselves that bit further down the world economic league table. That is why the Government have given the best basis for any organisation's continual growth that this country has seen since the second world war.

The Prime Minister recognises small businesses' importance to this country's economy and stability, which is why, at a Downing street launch in October, he enthusiastically endorsed a programme of conferences for small businesses throughout this country's length and breadth. The conferences, called "Your Business Matters", are organised and run by the leading associations for small businesses. They bring together everybody involved in the small business sector in the biggest and most comprehensive consultation exercise that anyone can recall. They provide an opportunity for small businesses to have their voices heard and to influence policy, and a report will be given at a final conference in London in March.

Mr. Sheerman: Will the report address the concern that hon. Members have heard consistently at their surgeries since the abolition of the enterprise allowance? If the Prime Minister meant what he said at the Conservative party conference about small businesses being central to the country's prosperity, why will he not bring back an enterprise allowance, which would give so many people the chance to start a small business?

Mr. Page: The hon. Gentleman exhibits all the traits of old Labour. The purpose of the conferences is not to allow the Government to dictate to business what it should have, but to allow small business men and women to tell Government what they want. At the final conference, we shall hear not what the hon. Gentleman says that businesses want but what they say they want, and there is a vital difference. That is a philosophical divide that the hon. Gentleman has yet to cross in coming to terms with the modern competitive world in which we live.

My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade gave a further commitment last October that there would be a Minister with responsibility for small business in every Department to watch out for anything that might harm small businesses. On 29 January, I shall chair a meeting of a group that will review progress since its inception. We want to help small businesses to be more efficient and to give customers what they want in quality, price, design and delivery.

We have come a long way in the past few years. The efficiency of British business has taken a leap forward, but we live in an increasingly international and competitive world. Goods can be traded in as easily as

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they can be traded out. Businesses that think that they can plod on, unchanged and uncaring are heading for a rude awakening. Increasingly, professionals are passing the enthusiastic amateur. Smaller companies are able to adapt and change, to diversify and to grow, and we have seen some of the advantages of that. The number of small firms in the United Kingdom has been steadily increasing for the past 20 years. At the beginning of the 1980s, there were some 2.4 million; there are now 3.6 million—an increase of more than 1 million. Ten million people work in small businesses that employ fewer than 100 staff. Such employment is vital to the United Kingdom's economy.

Growth in the small firms sector has been rapid. The start-up rate for small businesses has been some 500,000 a year, and hurrah for that, but it is not all good news. The number of firms going out of business is far too high, but the Government are addressing that by urging, supporting and training small businesses to be professional.

In other countries, small business men and women experience problems getting started unless they can show that they have appropriate qualifications. In this country, anybody—qualified or unqualified—can start a business. In other countries, the ability to trade depends on securing approval from the chamber of commerce, and the ability to borrow money is subject to strict scrutiny.

I do not want to stifle the traditional entrepreneurial spirit of the British people, which is well known and respected. We should give as much help as possible to a business start-up or expansion to ensure that it has the best chance of success and to weed out the "impossibles", thus saving all the heartache that occurs when the dreams come crashing down about the ears of a business's owner.

When such dreams collapse, it is not just the small business man or woman who is hurt but their families and other small businesses, which are not paid for services and goods supplied. It is tough in the business jungle, as I know well.

I am aware that goods are more easily traded internationally than ever before. The single market is a great opportunity. We talk of the opportunity of having 300 million-plus people with whom to trade, but it is a two-way street. Anyone who believes that he or she can operate in business without constantly evaluating its efficiency is destined for a rude awakening.

To be a small business man or woman, one must be different—one must be an individualist. Their desire to run their own business sets them apart. They must have that little bit extra—that independence to do their own thing and that individualism not to be part of a crowd. That independence is all very well, but with it must come the realisation that the small business man or woman cannot be expert at everything. They cannot keep up to date with the latest technology, watch the credit control, market survey the effect of the latest designs, investigate export markets, monitor cash flow, and so on—unless, of course, they are super-human, and few of us are. For mere mortals, therefore, the odds are that it will be difficult. The chances are that they might do some of those tasks—if not most of them—badly.

Now help is at hand. A revolution in small business support is sweeping the country. It went largely unnoticed at the beginning of last year, but it grows in stature daily. Last October, the President of the Board of Trade formally launched business link to deliver business support services in England. In Scotland and Wales, the business shop and business connect initiatives are developing in similar ways.

All Governments—I look at the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) when I say this—have had the interests of the small business at heart and have provided a range of services in a variety of ways. I must say, however, that the present Government, who are no different from previous Governments, have done so with confusing systems, with one Department for this and another for that. The small business man or woman, with precious little time to spare, often threw his or her hands up in despair and did what all small business men and women have always done—got on with doing his or her own thing.

The Government have realised that, and in introducing business link have set in train the most exciting support system for small business that the country has ever seen. For the first time, firms have a single local point of access for a wide range of high-quality services. Some 180 business links are open throughout England, and the number is growing daily. By the middle of this year, there should be some 260.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): The Minister will know that East Lancashire still does not have a business link, despite the overwhelming feeling that we should have one. Will he put pressure on Eltec—East Lancashire training and enterprise council—to get the business link off the skids and under way as soon as possible, because people want to see it in action? We cannot afford to waste time.

Mr. Page: I shall deal with that point in a moment, when I shall respond to the hon. Gentleman. I must say, however, that I agree, I agree and I agree.

Business links are designed to meet local needs. I should have liked more business links to be in place sooner, and I freely admit that I set ambitious targets, but the business link national assessment panel quite rightly will not approve any proposal to set up a business link until it is satisfied that there is a solid basis for continued success.

I come now to the point made by the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike). I am told that the business plan of only one TEC area remains to be approved. The hon. Gentleman has correctly identified it and it is my hope and wish that all the partners in the area will come together to ensure that England has 100 per cent. coverage. I am doing what I can to bring about exactly what the hon. Gentleman has requested.

Mr. Pike: I thank the Minister for that. I do not wish to apportion blame for the delay. If I can help in any way to achieve that objective, I shall be most happy to do so.

Mr. Page: Faced with the combined wrath of myself and the hon. Gentleman, East Lancashire will probably roll over and agree to proposals in a remarkably short space of time. I thank the hon. Gentleman for that kind offer.

The business links are a coming together of all the local support services for small and medium-sized businesses. They include the TECs, chambers of commerce, local authorities, enterprise agencies and export clubs. They will provide one focused support system for the small

business men and women of Britain. There will be one contact point, one doorway, one information source and one telephone number rather than the confusion of addresses, numbers and systems of the past.

In addition, in the further interests of simplicity, I have decided that from April 1996 the diagnostic and consultancy service will be integrated with the other similar services presently available through business link. That will help to reduce the number of separate schemes with which business link will have to deal.

It would be helpful if I were to give the House an update of business link's position today. Eighty per cent. of VAT registered businesses are now covered by operational business links. Some 64 business link companies are in business, running 180 outlets. When complete, there will be in the region of 267 outlets. Of the 195 towns and cities with populations of more than 50,000, 141 are covered by business link. At the moment, there are in post 460 personal business advisers, 30 innovation and technology counsellors, 20 export development counsellors and 18 design counsellors. The impact of business link grows literally daily.

The figures for the quarterly assessment for July to September 1995—the only ones available—when only 120 business links were in place show that at that time some 391,000 businesses were registered on the business link databases; more than 4,000 businesses a week were using business link; 7,000 businesses were advised by personal business advisers; more than 1,000 businesses were provided with diagnostic or health check services; more than 8,000 businesses were receiving counselling and more than 1,000 businesses were advised by innovation, technology, design and export counsellors.

Most important of all—and something to which I shall refer on more than one occasion—is the high level of customer satisfaction. For business link to be successful, there must be quality in every outlet—quality of information and service. Quality must be the watchword. It must be in every aspect of the organisation. Just as the name of a seaside resort runs through a stick of rock from beginning to end, quality and business link must be synonymous. That is why business link is required to undergo a tough accreditation process based on the internationally recognised system ISO9001. There will be a third-party assessment by approved certification bodies, independent, I hasten to add, of Government.

Monitoring and evaluations are necessary buttresses to the process to ensure that quality is high. That means quarterly monitoring information covering the number of businesses using the business links, the number of businesses provided with information by business links and the number of businesses advised by personal business advisers—the PBAs—and specialist advisers, as well as customer satisfaction. In addition, Ernst and Young is evaluating the earliest business links, the results of which I hope to have to hand in the near future.

The objectives are to provide early information on business link's effectiveness, to assess the added value of business link and to identify critical issues in the first years of business link's life. In addition, as if that were not enough to ensure high standards and quality, MORI is operating a business link tracking survey to measure firms' awareness, perception and use of business link. Furthermore, an impact indicators feasibility study—a rather grand phrase—will track the performances of firms helped by business link against a control group. There is also the wild card in the pack, a mystery inquirer exercise, to analyse the quality of the information and service received by businesses from business link.

I have gone through everything that is happening, the numbers involved and the growth rate of business link, and I have emphasised the importance of quality. But what does all that mean in the tough marketplace out there in which every business must take part? I have here a wodge of literally hundreds of cases of companies which have been helped by business link. I pull out a couple, purely at random, and surprise, surprise, one happens to be in the constituency of the Leader of the Opposition.

That is a company called Minicraft, a management buy-out company making miniature power tools in Durham. The management team of Neil Stentiford and Neil McPherson met the personal business adviser in Durham, Eddie Jonas, with the result that they have received help in staff training and in overseas exhibitions and their sponsorship. As I understand it, that business link partnership will continue and the company is now forecasting a 50 per cent. increase in activity during the next three years.

The other case that I have by chance selected concerns a company called Med-Lab in the constituency of the shadow Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett). Med-Lab is a supplier of materials to the aircraft industry and monitoring equipment to the petrochemical industry. The area PBA, Caroline Feneley, worked with the managing director, Steve Exon, helping to introduce electronic data interchange. As a result, the company now has a simpler ordering process for its materials, cutting time and cost and giving it a competitive edge. The managing director, Mr. Exon, concluded:

"Business Link have been of invaluable help during this period of development."

Those experiences come from the real world where one lives or dies depending on how well a business is run. As I say, I have literally hundreds of examples here and I know that there are even more at each individual business link.

But when we look to the future, everything comes back, as I said, to the quality of service. The more businesses there are with experience of the high-quality help and advice provided by business link, the greater will be the snowball effect in terms of awareness.

I am under no illusions. The challenges are formidable, but we must meet them if business links are to achieve the potential of which they and British businesses are capable. That will require continual commitment from all. It will require the commitment of partners to set aside occasional unproductive rivalry—I look at the hon. Member for Burnley as I say that—and concentrate on the needs of customers, the commitment of business link to continued improvement and high-quality services and the commitment of customers to spread the word. In addition, there must be commitment from Government to help to develop the network and fund the continuing provision of services.

The country's wealth was built on trade. Small business men and women went to every corner of the globe to sell British products, beating foreign competition and creating this nation. I believe that a resurgence of small business will enable the country to claw its way back up the

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economic table and create more jobs and wealth, and to aid the expansion of a caring society. Only small businesses—not the big boys—will bring that about.

I strongly believe in the concept of business links' pulling together all the partners that I have mentioned. I think that, when the political history of the 1990s is written, the start of business links will rank among the Government's finest achievements. The spirit that motivates the small business man and woman is at the heart of the nation: it is a spirit to be cared for and nurtured. I will not forget that, and nor will the Government.

5.20 pm

Mrs. Barbara Roche (Hornsey and Wood Green): The Opposition welcome the debate. I shall begin on a harmonious note. The idea of business links is undoubtedly good, and I agree with the Minister that small businesses are the backbone of our economy as both wealth creators and employers; but they face a formidable task. All too often they lose out to big business in the attempt to obtain finance from the banks at the right time, and to cope with the compliance burden placed on them by government.

I welcomed the Minister's frank admission that the country needs to claw its way back up the economic table. Britain has fallen behind in the world prosperity league, and enabling small businesses to grow and prosper is one way in which we shall be able to claw our way up. It is good to hear a Minister admit what the Opposition have been saying for some time.

As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition—the next Prime Minister—said in Singapore on Monday,

"stakeholders in a modern economy will today, more frequently than ever before, be self employed or small businesses. We should encourage this, diversify the range of help and advice for those wanting to start out on their own and use the huge potential of a developing technology to allow them to do so successfully".

I say with conviction that business links are a good idea because they were Labour's idea. The idea was set out in our manifesto, in which we promised to

"establish a network of one-stop advice centres providing small and growing businesses with access to high-quality specialist assistance."

Such a network was badly needed: small businesses were faced with a chaotic maze when it came to obtaining support and help. Should they go to the local training and enterprise council, the local enterprise agency, a high street bank, the economic development unit of the local council, an accountancy firm or some other body? Daunted by the prospect of trailing around all of them, a small business might decide that it would be better off managing on its own. Because they do not know where to go, many small businesses fail to realise their potential for growth.

Opposition Members welcome the Government's decision to take Labour's good advice and introduce a network of one stop shops. Unfortunately, Ministers have handled the implementation of that decision incompetently, hastily and in a manner that—according to the Department of Trade and Industry's own internal auditors—exposed the Department to

"financial risk and potential embarrassment".

The report was written a year ago, in January 1995, by four members of the DTI's internal audit team, and it makes chilling reading. It reveals that the current Deputy Prime Minister was so desperate to get the business links programme up and running that he ignored the warnings of officials, sidestepped proper procedures, authorised ultra vires payments and exposed the Department to financial risk and embarrassment.

According to the report,

"the first BL projects were pilots, but there was insufficient time for full evaluation and the establishment of best practice . . . On a number of occasions the Guidelines for Officials and other appraisal procedures were not rigorously observed, so that, for example, BL outlets could meet target opening dates."

Those observations were borne out by a conversation that I had recently with the chairman of a business link, who told me that, if he had followed DTI guidelines, his organisation would have gone into liquidation.

The report also states:

"Financial appraisal of BL business plans has not been sufficiently rigorous."

The auditors found

"instances where Government Office accountants had questioned the future viability of a BL as proposed, and although the accountants' caution had been noted, the business plan proceeded."

The auditors considered that

"the lack of rigour in financial appraisal and approval . . . may have contributed to the parlous financial state of many Business Links."

A damning sentence reads:

"Many of the problems stem from policy decisions outside the control of DTI officials".

Those decisions were clearly taken by Ministers.

For some reason, Ministers do not seem to want to discuss the report. When asked about it on 5 April, the current Deputy Prime Minister told my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie):

"the hon. Gentleman should respect the rights of Ministers to conduct internal investigations into projects which they are establishing . . . I do not think that it adds to the confidence in the regimes that we are establishing if reports are leaked before time and if misjudgments are then paraded in newspaper headlines."—[*Official Report*, 5 April 1995; Vol. 257, c. 1727.]

That is an extraordinary view for a Minister—a Deputy Prime Minister—who proclaims that he is in favour of open government.

When I wrote to the President of the Board of Trade to express my concern, I was told:

"funds used in the Business Link programme have not been, and will not be, jeopardised by a lack of financial appraisal and control".

Although every hon. Member would like to believe that assurance, the letter seems to express a remarkably ostrich-like view of the statement in the report that the then President of the Board of Trade's behaviour resulted in ultra vires payments, and the DTI's possible exposure to

"financial risk and potential embarrassment".

Nor could the Minister give me any assurances that what was described as a "parlous financial state" in the internal auditors' report had improved, and that a similar situation would not arise again.

The report highlighted financial problems and risks because 55 outlets had been opened in 16 months. Since then, 121 outlets have opened in a year. Can the Minister explain what has changed to ensure that those risks do not continue?

I must also ask about financial management. Given that the internal auditors' report referred to accountants' concern about the ignoring of the viability of business plans, and in view of the collapse of the South Thames training and enterprise council, which left huge debts, most members of the public would want to think that the DTI had considered what to do in the event of the financial collapse of a business link, but when my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) asked about the matter in July, he was told in a written answer that the DTI

"has not considered arrangements to respond to the financial collapse of an individual business link because the Department is not aware of any instances where a business link is facing or is likely to face this situation."—[*Official Report*, 18 July 1995; Vol. 263, c. *1223*.]

In view of the internal auditors' remarks, I find that reply astonishing.

Despite Government mismanagement on what most people—certainly taxpayers—would consider a fairly major scale, there is some good news about business links. Some are providing businesses with effective and helpful services. That is a tribute to their staff, many of whom are working hard to give the best possible service and to make the one stop shop network a reality.

Yesterday, I visited the London, City, Hackney and Islington business link in Old street, where I met members of staff whose commitment, ideas and record were admirable. Staff are working in difficult circumstances, and I was impressed with what I saw.

I travel around and speak to people. I must tell the Minister that a senior person, who until recently was working with another new business link, told me recently that she had felt that she was living in a "bureaucratic nightmare", so the Department still has much work to do. The overwhelming picture of business links that has emerged so far suggests that the service is patchy and the quality extremely variable.

When the Minister told us about the evaluation exercise that is to involve Ernst and Young, he said that a "mystery shopper" would be used. That is an excellent idea, and earlier this week I carried out my own mystery shopper exercise. The business link signpost line was launched with a flurry in October by the then President of the Board of Trade. Its aim was to ensure that, with one quick telephone call, members of the public could find out where their nearest business link was.

That is a good idea, but how does it work in practice? I decided to use the mystery shopper technique and find out. On Tuesday, I asked someone in my office to telephone the line and ask where the nearest business link office to Parliament street was. The person who telephoned was told most politely that the database was finding it difficult to cope at the moment, and that the inquiry taker would have to refer her to a freephone number.

The official could not find the freephone number, so she promised to call back. We have heard nothing since. As the member of staff had been on the line for five minutes while the freephone number was being sought, the person from my office asked whether the signpost line was free. The reply was that it probably was free, but that the official was not entirely sure.

When the Deputy Prime Minister launched the line in October, he said:

"It will not be Government or partner organisations which will ultimately judge whether Business Links are successful. Business customers will judge the effectiveness of services and determine their success."

I agree, but on the basis of the experience of this mystery shopper, the judgment is not a happy one.

I am not the only person who has found the service unhelpful. Today's issue of *Design Week* carries a letter from a woman who runs a small design consultancy in central London, and who contacted her local business link to find out the type of advice and information that it offered on local design consultancies.

The letter, which reveals an astonishing practice, says:

"Presumably Business Links' service is focused on saving businesses both time and expense locating specific resources, so you can imagine my bewilderment when I received numerous photocopied sheets from their local Thomson Directory. The listing included services from Artists to Interior Designers, incorporating the categories: Dental Technicians, Interpreters and Invalid Equipment and Services. This piece of literature, although no doubt fascinating reading, may prove in the long term to be limited in its ability to enlighten business managers."

As the Minister knows, design is a sensitive area for business links. According to the Minister's own admission, the ill-fated consultancy brokerage service wasted almost £3 million of public money when it was scrapped before it was launched. I understood from the Minister's reply, when I raised the matter with him, that the fact that the service collapsed before it was even started was partly the fault of the press. Apparently, hurtful articles had been written about the service and its mismanagement. Perhaps when he replies the Minister will enlighten us further.

I have given some examples of what makes small businesses loth to trust business link initiatives, and what makes the public rightly suspicious about the way in which public money is being spent.

A final concern is the extent to which firms know about business links. One of the Forum of Private Business's quarterly surveys last year asked respondents to rate the help that they had received from various support agencies and organisations in categories ranging from "significant help" to "no contact".

Of all the agencies listed—including enterprise agencies, TECs, local enterprise companies, banks, local authorities, colleges and others—business links had the lowest level of contact with small firms. Only 9.7 per cent. of respondents had had any contact with a business link.

Of course, members of the Forum of Private Business are typically at the small end of the range of small businesses and one must bear in mind the fact that the business links network is quite new and not yet complete, but it is worrying that such a small percentage of businesses had any contact with it.

Another major concern is the service that business links provide, or do not provide, for very small businesses with fewer than 10 employees which, according to the figures that the Department of Trade and Industry published last June, account for 94.4 per cent. of firms. Again, it appears that the service to them is patchy.

The bottom line of what business links must provide is spelt out in the business link service guide, published in October 1995, as:

[Mrs. Barbara Roche]

"an enquiry, information and referral service to start up and microfirms".

The manual does not encourage business links to consider that firms with fewer than 10 employees have growth potential. It suggests that a way of targeting firms with growth potential is the

"database approach—segmenting by size, possibly starting with all firms with more than ten employees."

We know that many firms—indeed, most small businesses—have fewer than 10 employees. We talk about small businesses being the backbone of our economy; we must remember that firms that employ fewer than 10 people often have tremendous growth potential and provide a significant proportion of the wealth of this country.

The manual continues:

"The national partners recognise that as a result of recent public funding changes some areas will offer typical start-up firms very limited services. Although only a small proportion of all start ups have traditionally received publicly funded support, in some areas this proportion will fall further and it will probably be impossible to achieve the suggested service options."

Business link's own manual makes the startling admission that there will be a decrease in service to small firms. I know that both the Federation of Small Businesses and the Forum of Private Business are rightly much concerned about that. The whole House, too, will be concerned about it. As constituency Members of Parliament, we frequently encounter such firms, and there will be much apprehension if it is felt that the service for them will be "very limited".

The Prince's Youth Business Trust has also expressed anxieties. Everyone agrees that that trust has an excellent record. Indeed, I remember the Minister of State for the Armed Forces saying on television that the Prince's Youth Business Trust's record in creating small businesses and dealing with unemployment was much better than that of the Government. The trust's excellent work in helping more than 24,000 18 to 29-year-olds set up small firms is well documented. The top 100 businesses started with the support of the trust employ more than 2,000 people and have a total turnover of £50 million a year.

In the past, young people who were helped to set up a business had recourse to enterprise allowance to get them over the period when they were no longer receiving benefit but when money was taking some time to come in from the new business that they had started up. Now that the business start-up scheme has been subsumed into the single regeneration budget, its national coverage is again extremely patchy. The trust found that only one third of TECs provide any form of grant for business start-ups. On top of that, it is estimated that the number of training places for new start-ups has reduced by approximately half. I would be extremely grateful if the Minister would address these points.

The uneven and inadequate provision hardly fits in with the Deputy Prime Minister's vision—he announced the beginning of business links as

"the highest calibre . . . business support arrangements in each area of the country."

Another worry in this regard was expressed by the Trade and Industry Committee, which reported that the unwillingness of business links

"to assist the smallest firms might encourage the establishment of a new range of services outside the BL network, particularly in regions where a higher rate of business start-ups is regarded as an important aim".

Since I had the honour to take on my shadow post, I have gone up and down the country to talk to small businesses. I have been struck by the number of small business networks that are purely self-help operations. For them, the local TEC or business link means very little. When I ask someone involved in a small business whether they have any relationship with the TEC or business link, I am often greeted with, at the very least, a lift of a sceptical eyebrow. There is a problem—in that the Government do not appear to be reaching the people who need the services.

At the beginning of my speech, I said that small businesses were the lifeblood of the country. They are absolutely essential to growth and—like the Minister—I salute the men and women who work in small businesses for every hour God sends to provide for their families and their communities. While we welcome the setting up of business links, the sad fact is that the Government's mismanagement of the scheme means that the picture has not changed for far too many small businesses. A good idea has been mishandled by the Government, who have been described by the ex-deputy chairman of the Conservative party as

"ineffectual and unable to deliver its promises."

No wonder John Maples said that

"small businessmen in particular feel let down".

I can assure the House that the next Labour Government will not let them down.

5.43 pm

Sir John Cope (Northavon): I am glad that the debate gives me an opportunity to applaud business links, as the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) did—at least in principle. But I shall go further, as I wish to welcome the progress that has been made, more of which has been announced by my hon. Friend the Minister this afternoon.

My hon. Friend said that business links were the first single point of contact for small firms. I know what he means, but he is not quite right about that, as ideas on the subject have been developed over many years. In 1967—a long time before I became a Member of Parliament—I helped my noble Friend Lord Weatherill, who was then a new Back-Bench Member, to write a pamphlet on small firms called "Acorns to Oaks". At the time, that seemed to be a novel and sparkling title.

In the pamphlet, we advocated a one-stop shop for advice and counselling centres for small firms, to be based on the American model of the Small Business Administration and to be provided or backed by the Government. I am glad to say that the Government's small firms service came into being under the Conservative Government a few years later. I believe that the service did an excellent job, both in signposting those who contacted it to all sorts of other services and Government Departments and through the counselling and advice service that it built up over the years.

Subsequently, the enterprise agency movement began to grow in the private sector, and an excellent movement it has proved to be. It was encouraged and financially

supported in the early years by the Government, and it was doing a broadly similar job in many respects to the small firms service. A multiplicity of provision grew up, which became more and more confusing as time went on. The services provided by the agency were added to those of the chambers of commerce and chambers of trade, which in many cases had existed for a long time and were providing advice and other services to all kinds of businesses. That is particularly true in the case of chambers of trade, which provided assistance to the smallest businesses and continue to do so effectively.

Twenty years after helping to write that pamphlet, I became the Minister with responsibility for small firms. While I was in that job, we created the training and enterprise councils, to build a partnership between the public and private sectors. The Government gave them responsibility for fostering enterprise, and business links have developed from the initiative taken at that time. The importance of business links is due partly to the concept of a one-stop shop. Information of the broadest kind on anything that a business might wish to know about—often in a signposting form—should be available in a single place for small firms. I believe that that is of particular value to the smallest type of firm—to which the hon. Lady was referring—which is least likely to have contacts and specialist expertise at its fingertips.

The TECs also provide training, counselling and guidance to small firms. My hon. Friend the Minister emphasised that far too high a proportion of small firms which start do not go on to succeed. We need a higher success rate, and we also need more of the firms that now exist to grow and expand. The hon. Lady made that point as well. I believe that advice and training are essential if that is to occur.

One of the difficult things about trying to run a small business is the breadth of matters with which a small business man or woman has to deal on any business day. Those involved must deal not only with the business, selling products and hiring staff, but with premises, machinery and production. A small business man must also deal with all the various agencies, and there is an enormous list of Government and local government agencies with which every small firm has to deal at one time or another. Those include the taxation agencies and revenue collectors to which my hon. Friend the Minister drew attention. There are also the local government controls of one sort or another that apply to different businesses—many of them apply to all businesses—and the various employment regulations and tribunals are also important.

There is a huge spectrum of matters with which a single person trying to run a small business has to deal, making life difficult for a small firm. A large firm has a finance director to deal with finance matters and to argue with the bank, a production director to deal with the production side, a marketing director to deal with marketing and specialists in different skills. Outside specialists, in the form of accountants and lawyers, can also be brought into play when required. The larger firm, with all its expertise, has a much better chance of mastering all the regulations.

The small firm has the crucial difficulty of trying to cover such a wide spectrum of necessary expertise, which is why training and guidance are so important. One cannot train someone in everything, across the board, in a single set of training sessions. That is why a place to go for expert and follow-up advice when trouble occurs or when a part of the business needs to be developed—as well as a place for initial and further training once the business develops—is so important. The link between training, advice and a successful enterprise was part of the logic at the heart of the idea behind training and enterprise councils, which combine training and enterprise under a single council that is composed of the leaders of local industry and commerce.

I cannot speak for the way in which business links are developing in the rest of the country, but I have been keeping an eye on the one that serves my part of the country—Bristol and the surrounding area. As far as I can see, our business link is doing extremely well. It is still early days though, as it is for any business link.

The business link in my constituency is rightly based in Bristol, but it has three outstations up and running. I very much hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will come and help us open the South Gloucestershire business link. Recently the Northavon chamber of commerce has rightly changed its name, in anticipation of the local government changes, to the South Gloucestershire chamber of commerce. The South Gloucestershire business link is due to be launched later this year and will provide a further service in what has been, up to now, the county of Avon. It will have the full backing of the South Gloucestershire chamber of commerce, of which I have the honour to be the president, as well as the support of the enterprising university of the West of England and the excellent New Work Trust, which is an enterprise agency of great vigour, and the other people who are backing the main business link in Bristol.

Wholehearted backing is extremely important. The Bristol business link is doing so well because of the wholehearted involvement of the main players: the Bristol chamber of commerce initiative, the TEC, and the local offices of Government Departments.

The revitalisation of the Bristol chamber of commerce, which took place two or three years ago, is of great importance. It is part of a whole new spirit that I detect in Bristol, which has been stimulated by developments such as the Bristol development corporation and the port of Bristol. I believe that the abolition of the county of Avon has also helped to revive the spirit of an enterprising city, which Bristol has been for many centuries.

The Bristol business link is situated in the chamber of commerce's own premises. It has an agency agreement with the chamber of commerce by means of which about £750,000 a year of services that were previously provided directly by the chamber of commerce are now being provided through and by the business link. That shows how much the chamber of commerce has been prepared to put its eggs into the business link basket. WESTEC, the West of England TEC, similarly provides its enterprise services and training through the business link. The Department of Transport has done the same in relation to its export services locally. That commitment by Bristol business link's backers is crucial to its success.

We heard earlier from the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) about the difficulties in his part of the country. Any hon. Members who are having difficulty with their TEC should look carefully to see whether the business link has the wholehearted commitment of the chamber of commerce and the TEC. If not, they should do everything possible to encourage that support.

[Sir John Cope]

The hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green endorsed the idea, as do I, that the customers will ultimately judge whether business links are successful. In that respect, business links are exactly like any other business. The customers decide in the end whether a business is successful by deciding whether to purchase its services or goods. Bristol business link is receiving about 1,500 calls each month, and I gather that there is a high level of satisfaction among the callers when their wide range of queries are dealt with. I believe that that is a success story.

It was good to hear the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green speak in support, admittedly in general terms, of small firms and to know that the Labour party has taken on board the importance of small firms. I take that as part of its lurch to the right, which has been going on firmly during the past year or so. To somebody like me, however, who has been a Member of Parliament for quite a while, in some senses it is rather surprising to hear the Labour party say such things.

Mrs. Roche: The right hon. Gentleman had the great good fortune to be a Minister with responsibility for small business. I am sure that he will agree that the first small business Minister was the late Lord Lever, which demonstrates Labour's commitment to small firms. The right hon. Gentleman will remember that the Bolton committee on small firms was set up under a Labour Government.

Sir John Cope: I—*[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Minister points out that Lord Lever really had his finger on the pulse of small firms; but I would certainly not take away from him the credit for having been the first small firms Minister. The Bolton report was not produced entirely in response to the pamphlet that I mentioned earlier, but the pamphlet was part of a movement that built up the pressure of small businesses. Harold Wilson's way of escaping that pressure was, first, to delegate the matter to Lord Lever and, secondly, to set up a committee to go away and look into it for a long while. The report that the Bolton committee produced was much more erudite, much larger and thicker and had many more appendices than our pamphlet, but our pamphlet read like a summary of the report even though it had been written two or three years earlier. The Bolton committee report came to the same conclusions, but by that time the Labour Government had been defeated and were unable to implement it.

What the Labour Government did do—I have no doubt that they would do so again if they had the opportunity, which I hope they do not—was to load burdens on to small firms. I believe that if Labour again had the chance, the steam would go out of the deregulation initiative, for example. We know that it would sign up for the social chapter and introduce a minimum wage, and we are told that it wants to give councils the opportunity to raise extra money from business rates instead of raising it from the voters through council tax.

Those measures are anti-small business and would make life extremely difficult. There is no doubt that in due course Labour would think of ways to discriminate against the self-employed, as it did in the past, in matters such as national insurance. That is no way to help small businesses flourish and grow. The proof of that is in the way in which small firms, as my hon. Friend the Minister said, have grown and flourished since the Labour Government were defeated in 1979 and all the various bits of discrimination that I described have been unravelled.

It is important that small businesses flourish, as both the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green and my hon. Friend the Minister said, because it is only the smaller firms that can provide the employment growth that we need, as well as a great deal of dynamism and flexibility in the economy. For the sake of the British economy and people, it is essential that we do all that we can to support small and medium-sized businesses and help them grow. Business links are an important core of that work and it is good to hear from my hon. Friend the Minister of the progress that they are making.

5.59 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): I, too, congratulate whoever decided that there would be a debate on business links, in which I am most interested. We have rather a select little group in the House this evening. As I am a former shadow spokesperson on small business, it seems that most of us have had some role in the subject.

The right hon. Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope) spoilt an otherwise excellent contribution when at the end of his speech he had to make a party-political onslaught. He misled the House in one slight sense. The fact is that all parties have neglected small business over a long period because they all had the view that the big companies—the big corporations, the massive employers—were the way to regenerate our economy, make ourselves more competitive, sell more abroad and bring our wealth creation and production to bear on our problems. All parties started to realise at about the same time that that was not going to happen. The number of large companies, and the number of people they employed, declined. Their percentage impact on our economy declined. That is dramatically demonstrated by recruitment.

Any university vice chancellor who was asked about graduate recruitment would say that the days of the big companies, the ICIs and the Unilevers, which recruited hundreds of graduates on the milk round, have gone. All political parties realised that future employment and wealth creation would come more from small and medium-sized firms and less from the big companies. Sometimes we are not honest enough to say that those are the facts of history. So often we, as politicians, do not lead the trend but follow it. Many people in business were saying that small and medium-sized enterprises would be the salvation of our country long before any political party or Government grasped that nettle.

Business links have arrived, as history shows, with all-party support. We all wanted some mechanism through which we could stimulate small and medium-sized enterprise. Over time, all the parties have committed themselves in their manifestos and working party documents to creating something like Business Links. It was not all in search of a one-stop shop. I have seen all the literature and know all the speeches about one-stop shops. Of course, it is good to have available one place to go to telephone and either get information there or access to information held there that leads on to advice from elsewhere.

Let us be honest about the fact that all Ministers, and potential Ministers, wanted a direct delivery system through which the Department of Trade and Industry could intervene in the small and medium-sized enterprise world. That is the truth of the matter. The Opposition wanted it, and the Government also wanted it, but the DTI never had a reliable mechanism through which it could operate at grass roots level.

The quality of economic development units of local authorities was patchy: some were good, some were excellent, some were average and a lot were pretty awful. The training and enterprise councils—late entrants—were patchy. One did not know whether they were still bound by civil servants who had not quite come into the enterprise economy, or who had done so but could not quite come to terms with it. The TECs were not exactly what was wanted by a DTI Minister.

The chambers of commerce were also patchy. Some of us have marvellous chambers of commerce—in mid-Yorkshire we have one of the best in the country—but in some places they are described as lawyers' luncheon clubs and they certainly do not have the ability to deliver.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): My hon. Friend means that they are Conservative party dining clubs.

Mr. Sheerman: I dare not say that as my friends in the chamber of commerce movement would never forgive me.

Whatever agency one looked at from No. 1 Victoria street, there was a deficiency. The creation of business links got all-party support when the then President of the Board of Trade made the announcement in December 1992 because we all looked at Germany and the statutory chambers of commerce and talked of having a mechanism as good as that at delivering policy on the ground. Let us get history accurate in respect of the all party support and why it existed.

To add a little salt and pepper of party-political debate, the Conservative Government's track record since 1979 on small business is pretty quiet. With all respect to the former Minister for small business, the right hon. Member for Northavon, my impression, in Opposition and as shadow Minister, was that the non-interventionist stance of the Thatcher years meant that there was little desire to get out there and intervene. Indeed, both sides of the House recognise that after Lady Thatcher ceased to be Prime Minister and we got a new President of the Board of Trade—who said that he was going to intervene before breakfast, after breakfast, before lunch, after lunch, and so on—the business links scheme was part of a change in the Conservative party, which recognised late in the day that it needed to be able not only to intervene but to intervene at grass roots level.

Sir John Cope: I absolutely disagree with much of what the hon. Gentleman said about the history of the matter. In the first place, the small firms service, which was set up under the previous Conservative Government, was a much more direct intervention by the DTI than were the TECs or business links, because they were Government offices full of Government employees. They did not have the partnership approach which has since developed.

Secondly, I disagree with the hon. Gentleman's description of what happened under my noble Friend Baroness Thatcher when she was Prime Minister. If he wants proof of that, he should consider the increase in the number of small firms and the huge list of things that were done on tax—some of which my hon. Friend the Minister mentioned—and on regulation, as well as the setting up of training and enterprise councils.

Mr. Sheerman: The hon. Gentleman and I can disagree on the history. Many would say that the restrictions under which small business operated through the 1980s became greater and that it became more difficult to run a small start-up business.

Let us consider business links in a positive spirit because we must make them successful. If they provide quality advice, they will survive and thrive. The only element of discord that I have picked up is the constant reiteration, "But that is always linked to being a business and making a profit". One of the biggest question marks over business links is where the medium and long-term funding will come from and whether the DTI's commitment will remain once the initial finance period, which I understand was for three years, dries up.

We must be careful, however, because while businesses will be able to stand on their own feet in our big cities, in constituencies such as yours, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and mine, it will be more difficult, if not impossible, for businesses to be a commercial success. That does not mean that business links are not doing a marvellous job by delivering quality and a service that helps small business. They are worth while and should be supported, but the Government and the forthcoming Labour Government must face that problem.

The business links programme delivers three kinds of specific advice: on exporting, design, and information technology, all of which are vital. The most fascinating and encouraging of those is advice on design. The Design Council's input is probably the secret of the programme's success because the local design networks that support the design counsellor give advice on which he or she can rely and a lot of information issued by the Design Council through publications and networking. That is how to maintain quality.

It is still early days and it will take time to get that aspect of the business links programme established. Criticisms are inevitable as the system gets up and running, but the design counsellor aspect is the secret of business links' success. If we want quality we must ensure that management and advice are monitored, and the Design Council has a role to play in that respect. I am not sure how the Minister intends to proceed in terms of the other two areas of expertise, exports and information technology, but those, too, need to be monitored.

If quality is to be maintained, we must ensure that the personal business advisers at the heart of this concept are of good quality. If they are the sort of managers who failed to run their own enterprise and could find nothing else to do, business links will not work. There has been a tendency to employ such people in some of the agencies that have been set up over a number of years. We need dedication to get the best personal business advisers. They must therefore be trained and, if we are to train them well, we must engage the best business schools, and economics and management departments.

We must also involve the best of the high quality private sector. I see an interesting synthesis in linking our business schools to some of this country's great

[Mr. Sheerman]

consultancies, such as Price Waterhouse and KPMG, so that they can participate in training personal business managers and then monitor their performance. If that is not done, small business people in the business link scheme will say that they received duff advice. Members of Parliament know that the business network in any town or city is the best network possible because business people tell their friends, and once a scheme gets a bad reputation it will not be resuscitated without a total relaunch and new name. So whichever party runs business links, it must ensure that quality is maintained.

The success of the scheme also depends on partnership. One reason why business links came into operation was that the partnership was not good enough. Chambers of commerce may not have talked to local universities, and local universities may not have been on speaking terms with their local authorities' economic development units. There were rivalries and a lack of ability to work together. Given that business links has funding and all sorts of advantages, it must be seen to be able to draw that partnership together and make it work. It must not be seen as a representative big brother—or big sister—of the DTI that will impose its will. A little frisson is coming from some sectors—

Mr. Page *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Sheerman: The Minister may shake his head, but a little frisson is already coming from some areas. No one is perfect and, given that 180 business links have now been commenced, one would not expect no disharmony whatever. A careful balance must be struck and local politicians and Ministers must do all that they can to encourage the partners to work together and ensure that the business link group does not get a reputation for trying to get its own way. Politicians know that that is not how to achieve an effective partnership and good results. We must make small and medium-sized firms understand that concept.

I strongly agreed with my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) that the scheme must not be geared only to where the Government think that they will achieve the quickest results. We all know that business schools and researchers have told the Government how to achieve the quickest fix and double the size of medium-sized businesses, but we must make the scheme appeal to and help small as well as large enterprises. I remember when the former President of the Board of Trade introduced the first pilot scheme in December 1992, which was designed for very small as well as large enterprises. Those small enterprises must be helped, which is why I made the jibe to the Minister when he introduced this debate that it is a pity that enterprise allowance has been lost. Helping small businesses to start up remains vital to their life blood.

Small and medium-sized businesses need help and good-quality advice, and the business link programme can deliver that. It is odd that I have been described as "old Labour" as the other day someone trying to be rude to me in a meeting said that I was a Blairite before Blair. I believe that the private sector should not be shut out.

Many of our constituents work as accountants, in the financial services sector or as bank managers and, over the years, have given high quality advice. They, too, must be brought into the partnership and not treated badly, although I agree that they must be monitored. Part of a Member of Parliament's job is to signpost good solicitors, lawyers and accountants to our constituents, so we do a monitoring job in that respect. All those partners must be given respect, evaluated and encouraged. In that way, business links can make a real contribution to wealth creation and the success of our country.

6.19 pm

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): I have listened to the debate with increasing fascination because we appear almost to be running a parallel debate. All hon. Members who have spoken appear to agree, which is obviously causing confusion. It appears that we are witnessing the Government and the official Opposition debating not whether the business links is a good idea, but who thought of it first. It is vastly entertaining.

I am always tempted to scurry out of the Chamber and fetch the famous Liberal yellow book of the early years of the present century and demonstrate that all the good ideas emanated from my party, but that might test the patience of the House too much. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I shall therefore refrain from embarking on what I believe would be a sterile exercise—my words would fall on deaf ears, at least.

I listened to the Minister's remarks with great interest. Although I cannot quite accept some of the glowing sentiments that he expressed, I can agree that the one stop shop—the business links—is a good idea that deserves support from both sides of the House. By concentrating services and help for small business in one place which, one hopes, is accessible by one telephone call, business links is a vast improvement on the confusing plethora of services from different sources that existed previously. Organisations that were trying to make their way in business might previously have found it too daunting to seek help, and returned to doing whatever they did previously.

I shall discuss several matters that show that we should not be complacent. I hope that the Minister will direct attention to those matters of concern in the months ahead. Specifically, I shall speak about the help that is needed by very small businesses, about which several hon. Members have spoken. I shall also discuss the amount that the business link is likely to charge small businesses for its services, and the best way in which to streamline the services that are provided by chambers of commerce, training and enterprise councils and other organisations. I do not believe that streamlining is quite as easy as might have been inferred from some hon. Members' speeches.

We must emphasise the importance of micro-businesses—businesses with one to nine employees. Several hon. Members have mentioned them. As the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) said, they represent nearly 95 per cent. of all the firms in the country. Equally important is the fact that they represent more than 28 per cent. of the work force. They make an important contribution to our economy.

The Minister emphasised the importance of small businesses to the economy. Their needs should be addressed carefully and specifically and they should be vigorous supported.

The small business has great difficulty employing key staff to cope with the management tasks that are taken on as a matter of course by larger enterprises. I remember, from my professional experience running my own office with a few staff—slightly more than 10, but certainly not in the wider range—becoming a multi-skilled person, not because I wanted to but because I had to. That is a common experience. People spend many long hours trying to do the accountant's job after most others have gone home, and hope that they have got it right.

A great problem for micro-businesses, as I call them, is having skills in-house, training their staff and undertaking financial planning, business development and the essential management task of marketing. The problem is that, although they recognise that they do not have skills in-house, they often do not have the financial resources to buy in expertise either. They are too busy trying to make a turn on their day-to-day business. Whatever profit they make might be kept for the days when the orders do not come in; it is not automatically spent on buying in expertise on matters that are separate from their main function.

Many small business are very suspicious of consultants. I am an ex-consulting engineer, so I know. The people who earn their living on the knife edge often say, "If you ask a consultant the time, the first thing he will do is borrow your watch". A politician would probably not give it back. The key point is that many small businesses operate at the margins, and cling on by their fingertips to survive. They do not have the fat in their financial operations that enables them to employ outside expertise.

Under the current regulations, many firms have little opportunity to take up the services offered by business links. It is not only a question of cost. Small firms with four or five employees—there are many of them—cannot spare the employee time involved in making contact with business links.

We must introduce imaginative ways of delivering business links services. We must use distance learning techniques, set up support networks—as other hon. Members have said, that is happening informally—and use new technology. If business link is to succeed, it must be based on imaginative and time and resource efficient techniques to enable very small businesses to take advantage of it.

I should like to mention cost comparison. I mentioned that small businesses are conscious of the margins on their resources. We must come to grips with the fact that many small businesses will take a very critical look at the charges that will eventually flow from using business link services.

We know that the highest growth in new businesses is in the service sector which, basically, involves selling people's time and expertise. The hourly rates chargeable for people's time have inevitably been driven down by the recession and by fierce competition, not only in the United Kingdom but world wide. We now confront global competition through the information super-highway. That competition will have a strong impact on the profitability—and the soundness—of small businesses in the service sector.

It is now possible, in no more time than it takes to go down the road to a local supplier, to buy in computer programming and project design from centres as far away as India, where overheads and wage costs are much lower. A company that sells a product that depends on a person's time, finds itself competing—somewhat unfairly, one might say—with companies whose costs are dramatically lower but whose products are as available because they are on tap on the information super-highway.

The charges for business link services must reflect that super-competitive environment. If clients or potential clients of business links who are in the service sector find that, when pricing their products, they cannot do more than double the salary costs to cover overheads, social costs and perhaps some profit, they will not be prepared to pay business links charges approaching those that management consultants like to charge. Business links must be able to operate sympathetically to small businesses and at rates that clients consider reasonable and worth while. Their clients are at the sharp end and know how tight the margins are.

I shall now discuss combining the skills of the chambers of commerce with those of the TECs. Following that avenue to concentrate services is an attractive option because one draws in established skills and the other draws in organisations that are well known in the business community and supported by it. It would be wrong, however, if the House were to assume that that course would be a panacea. Much depends on the location and culture of the business community being served.

When I was the Liberal Democrat spokesman for employment and training, I had the opportunity to visit Northampton. I was much impressed by the results of the Northamptonshire TEC's merging with the Northamptonshire chamber of commerce. There were some remarkable results in training programmes, but that is a subject for another day. The important factor is that both bodies served the county of Northamptonshire. Their boundaries were coterminous, so, when they merged, the synergy between the two was obvious and the chamber of commerce's representatives on the board of the new organisation were elected from the membership of the old chamber of commerce—something that is unusual, but to be encouraged.

In Hampshire, such easy merging and synergy is probably a long way away. We have two major cities, Portsmouth and Southampton, which have distinctly different cultures. There is a long history of fierce competition between them, perhaps going back to the civil war when, as I remember, they were on different sides. That competition runs through everything from their soccer teams to their universities. Each city has a powerful chamber of commerce that competes with the other for Government assistance, business development and export trade.

Hampshire TEC, however, has to serve the needs of both cities fairly and without favouritism—and they are two completely different areas. The day that the Hampshire TEC and the chambers of commerce of Portsmouth and Southampton contemplate a merger is so far away as to be out of sight.

I have received feedback from the business community in Hampshire, where business link is due to be launched in 1996. During the past couple of years, much effort has been expended on ensuring that we set in place effective working partnerships for the benefit of the business community of Hampshire. I have received feedback that suggests that, at times, the efforts have been plagued by shifting goalposts as the DTI's objectives change to

[Mr. David Chidgey]

respond to the problems that it encounters in other parts of the country. I accept that the process is iterative, but that creates extra problems for the TEC which is trying to set business links in place.

The primary concern in Hampshire in the run-up to the launch of business links is its longer-term financial viability, which hon. Members touched on earlier. It is intended that, after three years of DTI pump-priming, funding should end. The DTI's view seems to be that, by that time, sponsor and partner contributions and the income generated from services will be sufficient to allow the organisation to survive independently. That might be right, but it is difficult to see where the profits will be made. Will they be made from making margins on DTI service contracts? For that to happen, the DTI will have to be happy with the level of margin made, bearing in mind the value-for-money responsibilities rightly attached to Government funding. The DTI will not want business links to make excessive profits on contracts. Will the profits come from charging customers for services, in full or in part, taking due regard to the European Union's state aid rules?

We are only too aware—I think that the DTI is learning by experience of business links elsewhere—of the reluctance of small businesses to pay for anything they do not have to pay for. Some services will continue to be funded, in part or in full, by the DTI, but that funding will not cover the costs of operating even the most cost-effective business links. The worry is that the business links network is only now beginning to confront the DTI with the reality of business plans and the likely funding gap in the fourth year of operation.

The DTI recognises that some of the assumptions of growth in income from customers are at best over-optimistic and at worst totally unrealistic. It cannot have it both ways: either such growth will occur or the DTI must be prepared either to invest more money or to allow business links to make bigger margins on publicly funded services. More realism is essential if business links is to work.

6.34 pm

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): I have enjoyed our debate, which has been held in a relatively uncrowded House. I particularly enjoyed the imagery of acorns and oaks used by the right hon. Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope). The evidence on the ground in Rotherham and South Yorkshire is that the Government's support for business has remained very much at the acorn stage in terms of creating new jobs or new businesses.

I also enjoyed the honesty of the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Energy, as I think that we heard for the first time from the Government Front Bench an open admission of the dismay and shame that all hon. Members should feel at the dramatic slump in the United Kingdom's standing in world competitive league tables. We have dropped from 12th when Labour was last in office to 18th today—and we are still falling fast. Investment as a percentage of gross domestic product—along with demand, that is one of the key components for sustaining any small business culture—is about 17 per cent. compared to 23 per cent. in Australia, 25 per cent. in Switzerland and 29 per cent. in Japan. The Government's lack of commitment to jobs and business is reflected in the number of small businesses that we have.

I am grateful to the Minister for a written reply that he provided to me just before Christmas in which he said that in Yorkshire and Humberside the number of VAT registrations, which is the only real measure we have for small businesses, dropped from 17,100 in 1990 to 13,300 in 1994—a slump of 25 per cent. Even taking into account the change in the VAT threshold, the Yorkshire figures show an absolute decline. The significant problem faced in South Yorkshire is the slump in small businesses.

One reason why small businesses fail to get off the ground in Rotherham and South Yorkshire is that so many organisations purport to help them. I was pleased to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), the shadow Minister with responsibility for small businesses, draw attention to the plethora of organisations that purport to represent businesses. There are TECs, chambers of commerce and, in the industrial sector, the Engineering Employers Federation. Companies may belong to the Confederation of British Industry or they may belong to the Institute of Directors. The sum of the parts of business representation, guidance and advice never seems to add up to a convincing whole.

We have to take a special test to drive a bus, practise law or build a house. But the Minister proclaimed with pride that no test, qualification, proof of financial commitment or willingness to join an organisation that might provide guidance and help was necessary for anyone wishing to start a business. I do not wish to put hoops in the way of individuals who wish to form any sort of business, but we must look at our more successful competitor partners and be modest enough to learn from their experience.

There are 12,000 unemployed people in Rotherham and approximately 4,000 firms can be identified in the borough. The question that I continually ask myself is: how can policies be shaped allowing each firm to take on one extra employee—which would mean that unemployment in Rotherham would drop by one third—or even two extra employees? It is not a simple mechanical, arithmetical progression, but if we endeavour to help small businesses, perhaps we shall tackle the pressing problem of unemployment in my constituency and those of my hon. Friends who also represent Rotherham.

The social chapter is quite irrelevant as it expressly excludes small businesse. Low wages, however, are vital. Rotherham employment service advertises jobs paying £1.80, £2, £2.50 and £3.50 per hour. Anyone who accepts those low-paid jobs then has to be subsidised through the welfare system by the taxpayers of Rotherham. That is why the tremendous echo that is reverberating around the country was created not by Baroness Thatcher in a speech designed to divide the Conservative party, as we shall hear later tonight, but by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition in his speech on the need for a stakeholder economy. That speech was based on the idea of partnership.

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Energy will reply to the debate. His predecessor as the Minister for acorns, now the Minister for Science and Technology, the hon. Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor), was formerly at the Department of Employment, where he poured sulphuric acid over all notions of partnership.

In the dynamic economies of Asia and the more successful partner competitors of Europe, partnership is built into the world of work. In Britain, even at the lowest level, there is immense ideological hostility to partnership in the workplace. That is the abiding legacy of modern Toryism. Instead of drawing on the talent, knowledge and commitment to their firm of employees through their representative organisations, we have suffered from the denial of partnership and a complete disinterest in the idea of the stakeholder economy.

During a recent visit to the Bundesbank in Germany, I was interested to discover that the strongest component element of the Bundesbank was the 4,000 co-operative banks based in the region. Representatives of those banks take the decisions that often have a great impact on our own economy, such as those on the interest rates set in Germany. There is a much stronger regional identity there and its banks and institutions are closer to the ground than our highly centralised, London-focused economy. That is why the chances of support for small business are so much better.

My hon. Friends have mentioned that the business links chain is unable to provide any help to the micro-businesses with fewer than 10 employees. Those businesses are the acorns that need fertilising, nurturing, guiding, sheltering from the sun or exposing to the rain, to continue down the metaphorical path of gardening, which is one of my favourite hobbies.

The excellent staff at business link in Rotherham are unable to provide the advice to the small firms in Rotherham that should receive backing. To reiterate the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), they find it difficult to support innovation and invention because the destruction of the apprenticeship schemes, which are the core of successful small businesses in so many of our competitive partner countries, has produced a shortage of skilled intermediate workers—low, medium and high-tech workers.

I pay tribute to the staff of business link at Templeborough in Rotherham, which occupies a wonderful site open to inward investment. I hope that representatives of all companies here and abroad reading *Hansard* tomorrow will speed to Rotherham, where they will find a warm welcome.

I also pray in aid the Deputy Prime Minister, whose performance this afternoon, when he kept a straight face while commenting on his support for the former Prime Minister, Baroness Thatcher, was a remarkable example of a still-lipped rictus such as I have never seen in the House of Commons.

When the Deputy Prime Minister was President of the Board of Trade—before he was replaced in that post by an invisible kilt—he wrote to me expressing support for the merger of the Rotherham chamber of commerce and the TEC. Voting for that process is now under way and I would like to place it on record that all three Members representing Rotherham support the merger, as do the leaders of the TEC, the business community and the trade union movement in Rotherham. We hope that all relevant companies will vote in favour of the merger. It will create a successful and vibrant Chamtec, as it will be called, which, together with the Rotherham economic partnership—which includes the local authority and business link—will work to promote the interests of the people and businesses of Rotherham. In essence, there is a sense of partnership and the creation in outline of a stakeholder economy and community in which everybody is invited to participate. No one is excluded for ideological reasons, as has been the case since 1979.

Labour's commitment to small businesses is clear. We are and always have been the party of the little person, in the sense of the men and women who are oppressed by stronger, more authoritarian, richer and more powerful elements in our society. We are also placing ourselves closely in common cause with the interests of small business in Rotherham and throughout the country.

6.46 pm

Mr. Page: With the leave of the House, I shall make a few comments in reply to the debate, which has been helpful and supportive. I welcome some of the words of the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche). I was not surprised that she claimed business link as a Labour idea. Labour has tried to pinch, beg and borrow practically all our other clothes, and this will be no exception, so its attempts to acquire business link as part of Labour party policy is no surprise.

I am not quite so sure about Labour's latest claims. The stakeholder gimmick sounds more like a return to the minimum wage, the social chapter and more trade union rights—but that would be moving away from the purpose of the debate.

When the hon. Lady has a chance to review her speech, she will note that she made very little allowance for the fact that many of the business links are freshly formed and still feeling their way. I wonder whether anybody working up a new business link will find encouragement and understanding in her words.

The hon. Lady's criticism of London is grossly unfair. She is obviously not aware that business links are not yet open throughout the capital and the overarching central link for London is still not fully in place. Therefore, I am not surprised that she did not receive the immediate, quality service that should be available when everything is in place.

The hon. Lady is absolutely correct about the consultancy brokerage service. It was an attempt to provide an unified listing service on a national basis. It was conceived with all the best of intentions, but when I took up my present post it was obvious that business links were planning that service on a regional basis. I am sure that the hon. Lady would not want me to pursue and continue a scheme that the business links did not wish to see operate.

Mrs. Roche: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way and I am interested in what he said about the consultancy brokerage service. My point was not that more public money should have been allocated but that the Minister or his predecessor should have taken responsibility for the decision, rather than blaming the press for its demise and the loss of almost £3 million in public money.

Mr. Page: I can say little other than reiterate that I have taken responsibility for that decision. When I assumed my current post, I said that the scheme would not receive the support of all the business links and that therefore it should be closed. That is exactly what we did, and I cannot follow the hon. Lady's logic.

[Mr. Page]

The hon. Lady also made great play of a conspiracy theory regarding the internal audit report. The Department of Trade and Industry informed the commission about the pilot project and later informed the commission that we were working up a fully fledged scheme. It was believed to be important to sustain the momentum of the development of the business network while awaiting the commission's formal approval, which I understand came through on 6 September 1994.

I turn now to the comments of the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), who has explained to me that he meant no discourtesy in disappearing from the Chamber, as he had a pressing engagement. I was very grateful for his contribution to the debate and I agreed with much of what he said. I thought he adopted a very positive approach to business link. In teasing him about his contribution—I hope that he will read my remarks in *Hansard*—I shall not comment on his attempts to rewrite history. However, I agree with him—and I return to my opening remarks—that we must have quality. He has obviously recognised fully the speed at which a business link can lose its good reputation with the local business community, and I am also only too well aware of that fact.

What can I say to my right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope)? He is a previous and most successful small business Minister and he has forgotten more about the small business scene than I shall ever know. I can only recommend that hon. Members read his words again and again, because they are wise, knowledgeable and skilful.

I thank the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) for his support. He is correct to draw attention to the future financing of business link. The Government have given a commitment for the three-year programme and we shall look beyond that when the time comes. I am convinced that there must be some element of charging. However, as we can see from the support programmes, more than £100 million will be available in 1998-99 from the Department of Trade and Industry for services.

The comment was made that small business people do not like to make any payment unless they have to do so. I understand that, but if business link can establish a reputation for quality and for being a sensible investment for small business to make, I believe that people will be prepared to contribute to making their businesses even more viable and profitable.

I acknowledge what the hon. Member for Eastleigh said about Northampton; however, I am conscious of the fact that in this Chamber there is someone, in the form of our Deputy Speaker, who has vast knowledge, skill and influence with regard to the merger to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

I am glad that the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) supported business link once again. He managed to plug his constituency business link in Rotherham and he referred to the merger between the training and enterprise council and the chamber of commerce. I leave it to the local partners to identify how unified delivery of service to business men and women in the area can be best achieved.

I shall not follow the hon. Gentleman by making international comparisons, as I could spend a considerable time pointing to the huge success of inward investment in this country: hundreds of thousands of jobs have been created and we now have one of the lowest unemployment rates in the European Union. However, that would be contentious and I would hate to introduce a discordant note at this stage of the debate. I take on board the fact that there must be support services for the micro-business. Obviously, micro-businesses grow into small and then medium-sized businesses. Huge, successful businesses that have developed from a standing start are few and far between.

I am glad that there is broad consensus in the House about the issue. It must be a good idea when every party claims credit for introducing and developing it. However, I must point out that it is this Government who have put business links in place. On a serious note, business links face formidable challenges. It will need the commitment of all the partners, political parties and customers in order to spread the word. As I understand it, the message from the House tonight is, "Well done so far. We look forward to seeing business links achieve so much more in the future."

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 17th January, the Speaker shall put the Questions on the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Lilley relating to draft Regulations on Social Security not later than Seven o'clock.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

Hospitals (North-west Kent)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

6.56 pm

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): I am delighted to have secured the Adjournment debate this evening on the subject of hospital provision in north-west Kent as it gives me the opportunity to reaffirm my determination to help to bring about the construction of a new, all-purpose, state-of-the-art general hospital in Dartford by the end of the decade. The new hospital will serve the interests and health needs of the people of north-west Kent well into the next century.

The Minister will know that the journey to this point has been troubled in the past, but it now appears that the hospital will become a reality, with the consent of all levels of Government and all levels of the national health service. For the benefit of the House, I must explain that the changes that are taking place in north-west Kent in the context of development within the Thames gateway strengthen the case for the new district general hospital as we debate health care in and for the next century.

Conservative Members who take a strong interest in health matters in north-west Kent are fully aware of the firm but sure steps that have been, and are being, taken along the path towards new build. Not for us the manipulation and incorrect usage of the A and B lists as issued by the private finance initiative sector and not for us the shroud waving of the Labour party: we are determined to get things done. It is interesting to note that, despite Labour's huffing and puffing, not a single Labour Member is present in the Chamber tonight to listen to and participate in this important debate.

As a matter of public record, I seek an assurance from the Minister, whom I welcome most heartily to the Dispatch Box, that his Department will ensure that the timetable for the construction of the new hospital is not allowed to slip. Will the Minister assure me that the involvement and interrelationship of the private sector through the private finance initiative is working satisfactorily and that the objectives that the private sector need to see fulfilled are, in themselves, sufficient reward to retain that sector's interest now and in the future? There may well be a need for the involvement of public funds alongside private funding and that would be a sufficient lever for the project in Dartford to come to fruition. I also hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will assure me that the evaluation of the project will be carried out speedily and effectively by Whitehall Departments so that there is no delay whatever to the timetable. I hope that he will be able to mention the timetable in his reply.

It is essential that my constituents in Dartford have an understanding of the progress made so far, and the progress that needs to be made in the future, if the project is to happen by the end of the century. It is worth placing on record the fact that we will have in Dartford, in north-west Kent, a huge range of diverse developments that will make the construction of the new district general hospital more essential.

Perhaps at this point I may pay tribute, not only to the work of my local authority and the leader of the Conservative group, Councillor Kenneth Leadbeater, but to the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold). He has worked with me in the trenches to secure our objective. I must also pay tribute to the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson) who has battled with us shoulder to shoulder on this issue.

During the next three years, the new station and its associated infrastructure will be developed at Ebbsfleet for the channel tunnel rail link. Bluewater park, which is a little closer to the centre of north Dartford, will generate many thousands of work opportunities for the people of south London and Kent. We have a huge programme of house building over the next 10 to 20 years, with a range of houses to suit all needs. I know that I sound like an estate agent.

Those changes will bring new residents and new workers, and people will come into north Kent for leisure purposes. The burden on the health service will be immense. We cannot expect a health structure that was developed largely in the last century, for purposes which were relevant and germane then, to be available to support the needs for health care of my constituents in the 21st century.

I hope that there will be no doubt after this debate of my commitment and my hon. Friend's commitment to the construction of the new district hospital. The determination of the Department of Health to support us means that the different interests will come together to ensure that we have new district general hospital in Dartford very soon. I am most grateful to the Minister for coming here tonight and I look forward with interest to hearing his remarks.

7.2 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): In the nine years that I have served as Member for Gravesham, one of the highest priorities for my constituents has been the replacement of our hospital facilities. My hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) has served Dartford for much longer and the replacement of our hospital provision has also been a high priority for him.

As my hon. Friend said, we depend now on three old hospitals that have served the area well since the last century. The need for a new hospital has always been clear, but the problem has been the cost of some £100 million, and it has been a daunting job for Ministers in the Department of Health to ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for a cheque for that amount. That is why, year after year, we have not got our hospital.

I am now absolutely delighted with the Government's new private finance initiative, which will bring private capital and expertise to ensure that we can enjoy the hospital that our constituents in north-west Kent have always deserved. I take great encouragement from the fact that there are four consortia composed of great household names bidding for the opportunity to build the hospital for local people.

I remind the Minister that there are two parts to the project. By far the greatest is the provision of the new district general hospital at Darenth park, but the provision of a community hospital is also of great concern to the people of Gravesend. At the moment, approximately one third of our general hospital provision is provided at the Gravesend and North Kent hospital in Gravesend, which is very close to the hearts of my constituents.

[Mr. Jacques Arnold]

The conurbation of Gravesend and Northfleet and the surrounding villages like Meopham and Istead Rise, and Longfield in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford, contain some 100,000 people. Clearly, basic hospital provision is necessary. Therefore, I am very encouraged by the intention of the Dartford and Gravesham NHS trust and the other trusts, especially the Thameslink Healthcare Services NHS trust, to use the Gravesend and North Kent site to provide a community hospital at a cost of about £8.5 million.

I hope that the Minister will be able to assure us that he has in his sights the need to provide finance, through the private finance initiative, for the follow-through. We will need a community hospital in Gravesend, when the general hospital provision—mostly maternity—departs from Gravesend and North Kent hospital to our brand new hospital in Darenth park.

7.6 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam): May I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) on his success and his luck in securing this debate? I gather it was because another hon. Member had to withdraw his subject and therefore my hon. Friend could bring forward his subject. We are having this debate at a rather more timely hour than could perhaps have been foreseen.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dartford has always been a stalwart supporter of local health services, and I am very pleased to be able to respond to his comments about hospital provision in the Dartford and Gravesham area. He has spoken eloquently about the need for improved hospital services in the area, and makes very good points which I have listened to carefully.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) also spoke and I also know of his commitment and enthusiasm over the years to his hospital services. I note also his support, not only for the new hospital proposed at Dartford, but for the follow-through, as he put it, that is so important to Gravesham—the new community hospital—which we hope will follow on from the main hospital.

Acute services in the area, as we know, are provided by Dartford and Gravesham NHS trust and are spread across three hospitals—Joyce Green, West Hill, and Gravesend and North Kent hospital. The latter, I believe, is known colloquially as the GNK. The main acute hospital is Joyce Green which dates from Victorian times. While those hospitals have served the local population extremely well over the years, they are clearly no longer well suited to the delivery of modern health care. They would need significant investment to remain in use in the longer term.

At present, accident and emergency services are located at West Hill hospital in central Dartford, along with trauma and orthopaedics. General medical, elderly and surgical services are provided from Joyce Green, while maternity and gynaecology are based at Gravesend and North Kent hospital. The difficulties of that three-way split are readily apparent. My hon. Friend the Member for Dartford has often made that point. Not only do patients frequently need to be transferred between sites, but the arrangement also creates practical staffing difficulties.

Despite operating from relatively poor buildings, the trust provides a full range of excellent health services, to the considerable credit of its 2,000 doctors, nurses and other staff who work for the trust. I am sure that my hon. Friends appreciate the work that the staff have done despite the inadequacy of the buildings in which they work.

The trust treated about 164,000 patients in 1994-95, and it expects to treat a remarkable 10 per cent. more during this year. That is excellent news for my hon. Friends' constituents, who will also be heartened to know that waiting times have been substantially reduced. The trust expects to have no over-12-month waiters by the end of March; the number of over-12-month waiters fell from more than 400 in February to no more than 69 in September of this year. That is a remarkable improvement and a great credit to all concerned.

More evidence of improving performance is to be found in the NHS performance tables. The trust achieved an impressive five 5-star rankings in 1994-95, including assessment of A and E services—four more than the previous year. Well over half of all the trust's elective surgery is now carried out on a day case basis.

As my hon. Friends pointed out, various proposals for a new hospital were made during the 1980s, but it was not until 1994 that a scheme appearing to be really viable emerged. It would not be helpful this evening to rehearse the discussions that took place in the intervening years; but people's expectations of a new hospital were raised, only to be disappointed. I can therefore understand the frustration felt by all concerned—local residents, hospital staff, my hon. Friends who have campaigned tirelessly and other hon. Members.

Although I can give no guarantees, there is now much more than a chink of light at the end of the tunnel. Dartford is clearly closer than ever before to getting its new hospital. For good reasons to which I shall come in a minute it is necessary for the trust to explore private finance for the scheme. In that respect it is making excellent progress. In June 1995 the trust was granted approval to test the scheme to provide a new general hospital under the private finance initiative. It advertised the scheme in the *Official Journal of the European Communities* on 5 September; following a pre-qualification exercise, four consortia, representing a good selection of the major players, were selected—as my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham pointed out.

The short-listed consortia have been issued with a draft contract, service level agreements and other documentation, and have been invited to submit their detailed proposals by the end of January. Following evaluation, the trust will select two candidates with which to renegotiate detailed contracts. Further negotiations will follow and the trust will select a preferred partner, probably this summer. It will then submit a full business case for approval to the NHS executive. On present plans I expect it to be forthcoming this autumn.

The overall process is as short and efficient as it can be, consistent with ensuring that value for money and the requirements of public accountability are achieved. If all goes to plan, building work should begin during the first half of 1997—that is the present supposition.

I can assure my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford that the project has the full support of all concerned—at authority level, regional level, NHS executive level and

Government level. I can assure him also that the evaluation will be carried out as speedily as possible in Whitehall, so there will be no delays at our end. The speed will of course depend on the detailed progress of negotiations between the selected consortia and the local hospital trust. I cannot guarantee how quickly or slowly they will proceed, but I know of no reason why they should not maintain their present rate of progress.

The scheme would create a new acute general hospital with up to 400 beds, an accident and emergency department and a full range of services on the proposed Darenth Park site. The new hospital would replace the hospitals at West Hill and Joyce Green and the Gravesend and North Kent hospital.

The GNK hospital will be transferred to Thameslink Healthcare NHS trust and be converted to a community hospital. I emphasise that it will be a large community hospital—the plans for it are quite ambitious. I can well understand the enthusiasm of my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham for the project, and I can assure him that the plans to take it forward will be finalised as quickly as possible, consistent with progress on the scheme for the main hospital. I hope that the follow-through will be quick, but it will depend on progress at the main hospital.

West Kent health authority is responsible for identifying the health needs of all its residents, including the people of Dartford and Gravesham, and for ensuring that those needs are met. The health authority supports the proposed new hospital. As the main purchaser of Dartford and Gravesham trust's services, it is in its interests to see that the trust provides services of the highest quality as cost-effectively as possible.

The planned allocation for West Kent for 1996-97 is £369 million, an increase of no less than £9.4 million, or 2.7 per cent., on this year after taking account of inflation. I refer here to the running costs of the health services in the area. That considerable improvement should be of immediate benefit to my hon. Friends' constituents.

The people of Dartford and Gravesham are now closer than ever to getting a new acute hospital, with the trust at an advanced stage of the PFI process. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham pointed out, the plans include not just a new acute general hospital but a community hospital too. All this is excellent news for my hon. Friends and their constituents.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes past Seven o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 15 January 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

Lockerbie

1. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking to resolve matters relating to his Department concerning the destruction of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie in 1988. [7442]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Sir George Young): My Department has thoroughly reviewed the UK national aviation security programme in the light of Lockerbie. Many improvements have resulted. Work continues to develop the security regime further.

Mr. Dalyell: May I ask the Secretary of State a question of which I have given him notice? Seven long years after Lockerbie, has not the time at last arrived for the Government to publish the circumstances in which the then Secretary of State for Transport, Cecil Parkinson, offered in good faith a public inquiry—not, as the Prime Minister would have it, a confidential inquiry—and why Mrs. Thatcher, as she then was, vetoed such an inquiry? Should not the Government also publish details of why the right hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon)—in equally good faith—told journalists in the Garrick club that the perpetrators of the dreadful crime would be found within weeks? If senior civil servants and current Ministers do not publish something on those events, they might be seen to be part of a wicked cover-up.

Sir George Young: With regard to the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question, my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon) explained the circumstances to the House on 21 March 1989, and I have nothing to add to that.

On the question of which the hon. Gentleman was good enough to give my office notice, when my noble Friend Lord Parkinson indicated to the British relatives in 1989 that he was prepared to consider a confidential inquiry, the question of how best to proceed had not been decided by Ministers. In making their collective decision not to hold such an inquiry, Ministers had to take into account the likelihood that a fatal accident inquiry would be held, and that a criminal investigation was in hand which might ultimately result in court proceedings.

In the event, a fatal accident inquiry was held, as well as three other inquiries. The fatal accident inquiry examined in detail the actions taken by my Department in response to intelligence received before the incident and concluded that they were not unreasonable.

Finally, the criminal investigation was successful in producing sufficient evidence to issue warrants. That evidence clearly represents additional information available to the Government which is not yet in the public domain. It is vital, however, that none of the evidence is revealed before the trial of the two accused, lest that prejudices the outcome.

Local Transport Provision

2. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his assessment of the adequacy of local transport provision. [7443]

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): We have allocated £830 million to English local authorities for 1996-97. I consider that allocation to be adequate.

Mr. Hain: Does the Minister acknowledge that Labour local authorities such as York and Edinburgh have successfully pioneered new packaged approaches which address local transport needs? Is it not high time that the Government followed their lead and adopted an integrated, long-term approach to transport instead of the dogma-driven chaos of privatisation and deregulation which have strangled our railways and bus services and turned our roads into travelling car parks?

Mr. Norris: That would have been an intelligent question were it not 18 months out of date. The packaged approach was developed by the Government and local authorities of all political persuasions enthusiastically support the approach because they see the good sense of it. The hon. Gentleman should know that packaged expenditure has significantly increased this year for precisely the reasons which—belatedly—he has come to realise make such sense.

Dame Peggy Fenner: Despite transport supplementary grant settlement being provided for the Wainscott northern bypass, Labour and Liberal-controlled Kent county council has delayed the start of the work and delayed issuing tenders. Why on earth did the Department not ring-fence the money so that the council could not indulge in such political chicanery?

Mr. Norris: We gave by far the largest allocation of the local transport settlement to Kent, which historically receives a large allocation. The order of priority for schemes, however, is a matter for Kent. I regret that my hon. Friend is disappointed with the allocation, but I hope that she will direct her questions on that subject to the county council, which does not appear to have been particularly enthusiastic about defending her constituents' interests.

Mr. Allen: Does the Minister agree with me that while the issue of transport is important at the national level, most transport measures—such as rapid transit, chicanes, traffic calming, sleeping police men—are delivered at local level and impact at that level? If he agrees with that statement, will he explain to the House, to local authorities and to the local electors why his Department has cut central support to local authority transport schemes by one half in the past three years?

Mr. Norris: I think that it is up to the hon. Gentleman to specify how much in additional resources he would like to see allocated for transport measures. Once he has decided that, he should have a word with the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) and clear that rather aberrant line with him. I fear that the Leader of the Opposition would utterly dismiss such loose talk.

Any responsible Government will receive far more good quality bids for local transport expenditure than are able to be financed. The sooner the hon. Gentleman learns that fact, the better he may be able to perform in his new portfolio.

Northern Line

3. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects new trains to be introduced on the Northern line. [7444]

Mr. Norris: I understand that London Underground plans to begin introducing its new, privately financed train service on the Northern line towards the end of this year.

Mr. Marshall: I welcome the substantial investment in the Golders Green depot, which will improve job opportunities in my constituency, and the £1 billion upgrade on the Northern line, which will improve the quality of life of many of my constituents, but may I ask my hon. Friend whether the slight delay in the introduction of new trains on the Northern line will involve the payment of any compensation by GEC?

Mr. Norris: I am happy to tell my hon. Friend that as a result of the arrangement which London Underground was able to include under the private finance initiative, late delivery of trains will indeed give rise to compensation. Taxpayers will get some of their money back if the contractor fails to perform. That is in stark contrast with the pre-existing arrangements whereby in publicly owned utilities no compensation was available.

Mr. Corbyn: Does the Minister realise that travellers on the Northern line have had an appalling service for a long time and that that situation continues? Can he assure the House that there will be no increased cost to London Transport or to Londoners generally as a result of the private financing of the new line? Can he also assure us that the people who will lose their jobs at London Transport if the train maintenance work is given to GEC or other contractors will be compensated, and that the people who are employed will be employed under proper conditions commensurate with those of workers at London Underground?

Mr. Norris: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that, historically, the Northern line has not been good enough. It was not good enough through all the years of Labour Governments in the 1960s and 1970s, and it was not good enough under the Conservative Governments interspersed between them.

I am delighted that the £1 billion improvement to the Northern line is now very much under way and that the almost £400 million-worth of new trains procured under the PFI should be introduced towards the end of the year. The detailed conditions of implementing that contract are properly a matter for London Underground, but I know that it is concerned—as the hon. Gentleman quite properly is—to see that sensible arrangements in terms of staff and the use of facilities are made.

London-Tilbury-Southend Line

4. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his plan to privatise the Fenchurch Street line. [7445]

13. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made on the privatisation of the London-Tilbury-Southend line. [7454]

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): The LTS rail franchise was awarded to Enterprise Rail Ltd., the management-employee buy-out team, on 20 December 1995. Enterprise Rail will deliver real quality of service benefits to passengers for less financial support than is currently being paid to British Rail.

Mr. Amess: Is my hon. Friend aware that my constituents could not care less who runs the Fenchurch Street line, except insofar as they want the trains to arrive on time, the fares to be maintained at a reasonable cost and to travel in relative comfort? Will my hon. Friend confirm that the privatisation will result in all of that, and will he take this opportunity to condemn inaccurate statements by Labour and Liberal politicians about the effects of the privatisation of the Fenchurch Street line on the level of services?

Mr. Watts: My hon. Friend will be pleased to tell his constituents that the new franchise operator has committed itself to the complete replacement of rolling stock on that line and has offered to increase the punctuality standard from the current 88 per cent. to 90 per cent. from 1 October 1996.

Sir Teddy Taylor: As the privatisation of LTS, which I fully support, is obviously very controversial, will the Minister ensure that the new operators will publish every quarter—perhaps every month—full details of changes, improvements or deterioration in reliability, so that the residents of Southend and other places can see for themselves whether privatisation makes an improvement or makes things worse?

Mr. Watts: Operators are required to publish details of their performance and, as I have just explained to the House, the performance standards against which their performance will be measured will be much more rigorous than those which apply to the current nationalised operation.

Mr. Mackinlay: Is not the minimum service requirement for the London-Tilbury-Southend line way below that of existing provision? What guarantees are there that the good intentions of those management people who have secured the franchise will be fulfilled? Is it not a fact that the overwhelming majority of the passengers who use the LTS line do not believe that the arithmetic will add up or that those people who will run that line will be able to maintain the services, let alone comply with the very attractive offer that they are now waving before us? Will the Minister ensure that the suggestion of the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) is fulfilled—that any backsliding, any deterioration on the commitments that those people have given, will be publicised and will be understood by the fare-paying passengers?

Mr. Watts: Passengers should stop listening to the hon. Gentleman and simply pay attention to the facts. It is not a matter of good intentions; it is a matter of contract. Enterprise Rail has contracted to maintain at least the existing level of service. There will be an additional off-peak service each hour from Fenchurch Street to Shoeburyness Mondays to Saturdays. There will be a minimum frequency of 15 minutes during the peak hour for key stations. There will be an hourly Sunday service for Rainham, Purfleet, Dagenham and Dagenham Dock stations. Services will stop at Limehouse on Sunday and there will be two new services out of London after 10 pm Mondays to Saturdays.

Mr. Channon: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the most important priorities on that line is that there should be new rolling stock? Is it not very welcome that under the new arrangements we are likely to have new rolling stock earlier?

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend is absolutely correct. Enterprise Rail has committed itself to an investment programme including the replacement of the entire fleet with new rolling stock, all to be completed by the year 2002, in addition to station redecoration and refurbishments, improved station security, public address systems and improved ticket issuing.

Mr. Mackinlay: Where will all the money come from?

Mr. Watts: From the efficiencies of the private sector.

Public Transport Investment

5. **Ms Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on investment levels in public transport. [7446]

Mr. Norris: The planned level of Government expenditure on transport over the next three years was announced in the Chancellor's Financial Statement and Budget Report in November.

Ms Quin: Is the Minister aware of the strong criticisms expressed by the Confederation of British Industry and others about the inadequate levels of investment in public transport in this country? In that regard, does the Minister know of the special anxiety expressed by business in the north-east of England about the report that plans for a freight terminal for our region are to be shelved and that, as a consequence, freight will have to travel 100 miles or so on already congested roads before reaching a rail freight terminal for the continent? What does the Minister intend to do about that, and where does that leave the Government's policy of transferring more freight from road to rail?

Mr. Norris: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving notice of the question that she intended to ask. The provision of rail freight facilities is essentially a commercial matter and rail operators and Railtrack will consider the appropriateness of investment decisions. Freightliner operates container freight services to and from a terminal in Cleveland owned by ICI. Two new freight terminals at Doncaster and Wakefield, readily accessible to the region, are being developed to handle European traffic. Loadhaul, the domestic train-load business based in the north-east, operates trains to numerous private freight facilities throughout the region. On that basis, the hon. Lady will understand that not only is there freight rail activity in her area, but that that activity is substantial. However, it is quite properly for the private sector and Railtrack to determine the pattern of particular cargoes on any individual expedition.

Sir Sydney Chapman: On the subject of investment in London transport, does my hon. Friend agree that the problem that we face today has been caused by chronic underinvestment in previous years, as instanced by the fact that in the 1970s annual investment averaged less than £50 million and in each of the five years of the 1990s it has risen to a staggering £500 million a year? Is that not a matter for commendation, showing that Government policies are on the right lines? Will my right hon. Friend listen with a degree of cynicism to those Opposition Members who complain about the lack of investment today when they were responsible for chronic underinvestment?

Mr. Norris: It will not astonish my hon. Friend to know that I happen to have the figures in front of me and they do indeed make embarrassing listening for the Opposition. Purely by coincidence I have the figures for 1997, 1998 and 1999, which show for those three years the investment was—*[Interruption.]* I meant 1977, 1978 and 1979; I apologise—I had not realised that the matter was so tender. I will make it clear by apologising and stating that I was referring to the halcyon days of the last Labour Government when, in their munificence, at current 1995-96 prices, the level of investment was £214 million, £198 million and £257 million. In the past three years, for 1993-94 the figure is £860 million, for 1994-95 it is £984 million and this year it is £1,085 million.

Mr. Chidgey: Bearing in mind the fact that the winners of the franchise for South Western Trains have made it clear that they have no proposals to invest in new rolling stock, how does the Minister justify paying them a subsidy of £55 million next year, particularly since when British Rail last ran the region as its operator two years ago it did so without a subsidy and at substantial profit?

Mr. Norris: These days one looks to the Liberal party to hear a distinctive left-wing voice. However, to refer to the intervention of the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), the answer is that the operator of the service will offer infinitely better value for money through much-increased efficiency in terms of both manpower and investment on a service that has traditionally not received either the levels of managerial attention or the level of investment to which passengers in that area are entitled. I very much look forward to a massively enhanced quality of service on that line.

Sir Alan Haselhurst: Looking to the future rather than the past, is it more likely that the levels of investment in public transport that are required will be better than those that we now know are projected if we were simply relying on the availability of resources in the public sector?

Mr. Norris: I think that my hon. Friend knows the answer. There is not the slightest shadow of doubt that, freed from the constraints of public sector financing, train operators generally and the railway industry as a whole will generate substantially greater investment in the railways because of the privatisation of British Rail that is now taking place.

Mrs. Dunwoody: The Minister will have noticed that, as I was told last week, the £1.8 billion from the rolling stock companies will not be invested in the railway industry. Can he assure me that it will not be hypothecated? In other words, presumably the £1.8 billion from all the private finance with which he is so delighted will go straight to tax cuts.

Mr. Norris: I would have expected more of the hon. Lady. She knows that that is a sham of a question. As I have said, investment levels will be substantially higher. The direct answer on hypothecation is that it would have been an extraordinary precedent in this or any other sector and, in truth, the hon. Lady knows it.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Would not the Government's capital progress on transport be very much greater were it not for the fact that the Government have to write off £453 million in respect of the Humber bridge debts? Is that not a clear example of the most expensive political sleaze case this century by the Labour party?

Mr. Norris: I am sure that the House will draw its own conclusion from my hon. Friend's pithy intervention.

Mr. Wilson: I am sure that the House is agog at the news that the Minister is currently writing his memoirs. We hope that they will be a little more exciting and accurate than the fiction that we have heard from him today. For instance, in response to his hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Sir A. Haselhurst), will he confirm that investment in the domestic railway this year is at its lowest in real terms since nationalisation in 1948? That is fact, not fiction. Will he also confirm that the much trumpeted Railtrack 10-year plan of £1 billion a year is less than has been invested in the railways even in the past decade? Will he send a message to Tory Members around the country who claim that privatisation is the only way to new electrification schemes and try to explain to them why the Railtrack 10-year investment plan outside the Heathrow area does not include a single new electrification scheme?

Mr. Norris: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the completely unexpected but none the less welcome puff. I shall ensure that he receives a rare unsigned copy in due course. Not one chapter has yet been written, but one should be grateful for popularity wherever it comes from. To return to the question, I merely remind the hon. Gentleman that there is not the slightest doubt that my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Sir A. Haselhurst) is entirely correct. Historically, under Labour Governments—indeed, specifically and particularly under Labour Governments—investment in the railways has been insufficient to meet the technical and operating demands on the system. It is clear that privatisation will liberate the various components of the railway industry to invest at an appropriate level and to improve standards and quality of service, as we have seen from the franchises that have already been let. The hon. Gentleman knows that. He is good at using clever words to conceal the fact that the Opposition's policy on such issues is in complete and total disarray.

Railway Rolling Stock

6. **Sir Roger Moate:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the provision of new rolling stock for Kent commuters. [7447]

Mr. Watts: In his invitation to tender for the south eastern franchise, the franchising director invited proposals for the provision of rolling stock for the full franchise term, which could include the provision of new rolling stock.

Sir Roger Moate: I thank my hon. Friend for the good news that the new trains for Kent commuters are likely to be part of the South Eastern Trains franchise. We hope, therefore, that the franchise will go ahead as quickly as possible. Given the size and importance of the likely order for new trains, will he confirm that the length of the franchise will be sufficiently variable to cope with such a big capital investment? Will he also ensure that the franchisee is expected to get on with placing that order very fast indeed?

Mr. Watts: Yes. As we have shown with the London-Tilbury-Southend franchise, the term can be extended—in that case to 15 years—on condition that it includes the replacement of rolling stock. That facility will also be available for the south-eastern franchise. So that no time is lost, British Rail issued a general notice in the *Official Journal of the European Communities* under the prequalification procedure which a franchise operator can use to take an early decision on the procurement of new rolling stock.

Dr. Marek: Why is it that, under the last Labour Government, commuters on the north Kent coast line could commute to London seated four abreast with plenty of space for their knees while under the Government's new order they will have to sit five abreast without adequate leg room?

Mr. Watts: I am tempted to suggest that perhaps some of the Government's health education propaganda about being overweight has been taken up by the people of Kent. The hon. Gentleman should know that Kent commuters have already benefited from the recent large investment in Networkers. They will soon benefit further from part of the Networker Express order currently being completed by ABB.

Ferry Safety

7. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the current United Kingdom policy on ferry safety. [7448]

Sir George Young: The Government are committed to the highest practicable standards of ferry safety. Strong pressure from the United Kingdom and other north European countries at the November International Maritime Organisation meeting led to the adoption of a resolution authorising countries who wish to do so to apply a higher stability standard to roll-on roll-off ferries using their ports. We shall continue to press for agreement on higher stability standards in north-west Europe and the Baltic.

Mr. Shaw: Last Saturday I witnessed Dover score yet another first when we carried out the first major evacuation exercise on a ferry ship in Dover port. The 842 people on board were evacuated safely and carefully without injury. I believe that that is the largest number ever evacuated from a ferry in Europe or in the rest of the world. Will my hon. Friend congratulate all 842 volunteers who took part in that very important exercise, which showed that Dover's ferries are immensely safe and are suitable for everyone to travel in and enjoy a jolly good holiday?

Sir George Young: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for spending time on Saturday witnessing the largest evacuation exercise ever undertaken on a ferry. I join him in complimenting the Marine Safety Agency and the crew and the owners of the Stena Invicta on that exercise.

My hon. Friend is correct in saying that there was an effective passenger muster and a successful launch of lifeboats, deployment of escape chutes and inflation of the first life rafts. An analysis of the exercise will be published in due course. I think that it is best to await that full analysis before coming to any final conclusions.

Mr. Flynn: As virtually every ferry disaster has occurred in mid-ocean with the ship on fire, sometimes listing or on its side and always carrying a broad spectrum of humanity—including the elderly and the young—how realistic was it to conduct Saturday's exercise in broad daylight, with entirely able-bodied adults and with the ship tied to the quay? Even in those totally unrealistic circumstances, only 350 people were evacuated from the ship within the time in which the Government said that 2,000 people could be evacuated. The weekend's trial has proved one thing—that roll-on roll-over ferries are the most dangerous form of passenger transport and that their systems are not fail-safe but fail-lethal.

Sir George Young: If roll-on roll-off ferries are operated and maintained properly there is no risk of the type that the hon. Gentleman has described.

As to the exercise, it is important to inject a degree of realism. We were dealing with volunteers who would clearly have been put at great risk if we had replicated the very dangerous circumstances that the hon. Gentleman has described. One of the reasons why it took some 65 minutes to evacuate all 842 people was that the passengers were over-cautious in going down the chutes, and were encouraged to be so by the master and crew. In a real emergency, I think that the hon. Gentleman would find that they would exhibit less caution.

Rail Privatisation

8. **Mr. Kevin Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his assessment of the progress of the Government's rail privatisation programme; and if he will make a statement. [7449]

16. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to review progress on rail privatisation; and if he will make a statement. [7457]

Sir George Young: In December, the franchising director awarded the franchises for South West Trains, Great Western and LTS Rail. The award of four more franchises will be made as soon as practicable. Railtrack will be floated in May 1996. Twenty-nine businesses, with a combined turnover of some £1.4 billion, have already been sold. Further rail businesses and franchises with a combined turnover of nearly £3 billion are on the market.

I am satisfied with that progress and am confident that the progress will bring benefits to passengers and taxpayers.

Mr. Hughes: Will the Secretary of State give me a guarantee today that, if privatisation goes ahead in full, there will be no reductions in the inter-city service to and from Doncaster? Does he accept that, if reductions take place, they will cause serious damage to the local economy in Doncaster? How will he justify that to the business people and local community in my town?

Sir George Young: The question that really needs to be asked is: if privatisation goes ahead, what on earth will the Labour party do?

On the hon. Gentleman's specific question, I hope that he will be greatly reassured by what has happened in the first three franchises: existing services have not just been maintained but, as we heard from my hon. Friend the Minister for Railways and Roads a few moments ago, additional services, which were not provided by BR, are being provided by those who are bidding for the new franchises. Far from providing a worse service, privatisation and franchising will enhance the level of service that passengers enjoy.

Mr. Jones: During the passage of the Railways Bill, hon. Members on both sides of the House were given assurances that Railtrack would remain in the public sector. Given that that is not now the case, what reasons can the Government give for not allowing a debate and a vote on that issue? Surely it cannot be because of a lack of Government time.

Sir George Young: The Government have all the powers that they need to privatise Railtrack. It has been our clear purpose throughout the past Parliament to place Railtrack in the private sector, because only by doing that can one get the benefit of full privatisation, which comes from removing the restraints on public sector investment that will always remain while Railtrack is in the public sector. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the network management strategy published by Railtrack, he will see that it is planning to invest at a higher rate than British Rail. That is a clear benefit to his constituents and all those who use the railways.

Mr. Dunn: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, when the state runs and owns everything, the people own and run nothing, and that is why it is essential to continue with the policy of privatisation, to open British Rail to consumer pressure for the first time since nationalisation in the 1940s?

Sir George Young: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. One of the things that we are doing is giving those who work for Railtrack an opportunity to acquire a stake in it. They will be offered shares in Railtrack when it is floated. All that we hear from Opposition Members is that they will resist if those workers acquire that stake. On the one hand, Opposition Members talk about a stakeholder economy; on the other, when we offer people a stake in their industry, they criticise us for doing that.

Sir David Madel: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that Railtrack has given a firm commitment that, once it is privatised, it will get on with the modernisation of the west coast main line, which will result in better rolling stock and faster trains?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is right. The signalling contract is under consideration at the moment; it is hoped to be placed in March. It is indeed the case that Railtrack has as a priority the modernisation of the west coast main line.

Ms Short: I am sure that the Secretary of State did not intend to mislead the House earlier, but I remind him that during the passage of the Railways Bill it was assumed by hon. Members on both sides of the House that Railtrack would remain in public ownership for the foreseeable future. As there is a massive difference between a rail network where Railtrack is in public ownership and one where it is in private ownership and the House of Commons has never been given the opportunity to vote on that issue, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that any party that claims to respect the sovereignty of the House of Commons should arrange a debate on the issue and be allowed a vote before Railtrack is floated?

Sir George Young: That is an extraordinary argument, produced by Opposition Members right at the end of the privatisation process. As I have said, the Government have all the powers that they need to privatise Railtrack. We do not need any more authority from the House. However, I would welcome a debate on rail privatisation, in which I would hope that the Labour party would at last come clean on what on earth its strategy is. As on so many issues, the Labour party is ashamed of its past and it is silent about its future.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the privatisation of the west coast main line will provide tremendous opportunities for further investment raised in the private capital market, which would never be available if the line remained in the public sector? That investment will allow the electrification of the line between Blackpool and Preston that is so badly needed, and we shall be able to reintroduce for the benefit of my constituents the through services from London that nationalised British Rail withdrew.

Sir George Young: One of the prime reasons for privatising the railways is to make faster progress with investment than is possible in the public sector. We have already heard in this Question Time about the extra investment in rolling stock that has resulted from franchising. Following franchising, rolling stock has been refurbished and renewed at a faster rate than under British Rail, and Railtrack's investment plan shows that it plans to invest at a higher rate than British Rail. I agree with my hon. Friend: privatisation will accelerate investment in our railways.

Transport (London)

9. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve the transport system in London. [7450]

Mr. Norris: The Government plan a continuing high level of investment in London's transport system, with increasing benefits to passengers from greater efficiency and increased private sector involvement.

Mrs. Prentice: Will the Minister apologise to users of London transport who have faced fare increases of up to 14 per cent. in the past week? Will he also apologise to the 100,000 passengers whose journeys to work are being disrupted by urgent repair work that could have been dealt with sensibly had the Government bothered to invest in the network?

Given that the previous Secretary of State for Transport—now chairman of the Conservative party—said only last year that fare levels would be stabilised and would eventually fall, will the Minister apologise to the whole country for the present state of our transport system?

Mr. Norris: That is an extraordinary series of requests, coming from a member of a party whose record of investment in London is so abysmal that we are now experiencing far more disruption than we would had it invested in the system properly when it was in office. It is shameful for Labour politicians to seek to extract a palpably incorrect interpretation from the considerable investment that is now taking place. The hon. Lady advances the extraordinary proposition that we should apologise for the fact that decades of neglect by Governments of her persuasion—indeed, all Governments—are now being remedied for the benefit of passengers.

As for the issue of fares, if the hon. Lady has any proposals, have they been costed by her right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury team? I suspect not.

The current Administration have ensured that London Transport now makes an operating profit on its activity, as a result of which investment levels are at a level unparalleled since the war.

Mr. Brooke: What prospect does my hon. Friend see of further new schemes to accelerate the movement of buses in London, similar to the initiative at Shepherds Bush?

Mr. Norris: I certainly foresee a continuation of that programme. Bus priority is another of the programmes that have received increased funding in this year's London local transport settlement; it is the key to better patronage of buses and, in turn, to the success of any urban transport system.

The experiment at Shepherds Bush has been extremely successful. We are building on it, with local authorities in west London and other authorities of all political persuasions throughout the capital.

Mr. Spearing: Does the Minister recall the encouraging reply given by his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert) about the proposals of Transport on Water for an imaginative scheme providing public water buses in London, to be funded by a mixture of public and private capital? The public capital would cover the transfer of traffic from road to water—mentioned by the right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke)—particularly the transfer of coach traffic, some of it carrying visitors, among the five tourist centres between the Tate gallery and the tower of London. Such a scheme would reduce congestion, and secure the support of the people of London. As the tide of time is now against the Government, will they float the scheme and push the boat out while they have the chance?

Mr. Norris: That was a rather tortuous metaphor, but, on the substance of the hon. Gentleman's question, I have to say that I share his aspiration. I have long wanted river boat services to return to the Thames, but the prerequisite is that they should be viable, at least at the operating level. I know that the hon. Gentleman agrees with that proposition.

I am happy to examine the proposal made by Transport on Water—indeed, we have plans of our own to try to improve river services. However, the hon. Gentleman,

who is extremely knowledgeable about the Thames and its use in the past 30 or 40 years, knows that such a proposition is not as easy to implement as it appears. There are some inherent costs in waterborne transport operations which far exceed those per passenger mile on, for example, buses or light rail.

Central Railway Project

10. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the progress of the Central Railway project. [7451]

Mr. Watts: The promoters of the Central Railway project are preparing an application under the Transport and Works Act 1992.

Mr. Robathan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He will know that most hon. Members, and, indeed, most members of the public, share the aim of shifting more freight from the roads to the railways. However, he may not be aware that recent reports in local newspapers, to the effect that an application has already been made by Central Railway plc, have added to the confusion, uncertainty and unhappiness, and especially the blight, along the chosen route. Will my hon. Friend reassure the House and my constituents in Lutterworth and elsewhere that, as soon as an application is made to his Department, the House and the public will get to know about it and the public will have an opportunity to state their views? At the moment, there is tremendous uncertainty and unhappiness along the entire route from Kent to Leicestershire.

Mr. Watts: If an application is made, it is virtually certain that it will be regarded as a scheme of national significance under the 1992 Act. The House would therefore have an opportunity to debate the principle of the scheme.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

New Parliamentary Building

31. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Chairman of the Finance and Services Committee what is his latest estimate of the cost of the new accommodation to be provided in phase 2 of the new parliamentary building. [7472]

Mr. Paul Channon (Chairman of the Finance and Services Committee): The estimated cost of the new parliamentary building remains within the maximum risk estimate of £165 million which was approved by the House of Commons Commission in 1993. That figure excludes inflation in building costs between that date and 1999, when the building is scheduled for completion. As the House will realise, building cost inflation is difficult to predict.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my right hon. Friend agree that Parliament should not only erect a very fine new building but achieve value for money for the taxpayer? Will he provide the House with full details of this very expensive new building so that we can have a proper debate about it?

Mr. Channon: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend on both points—about the need for the building to be of high quality and yet not too extravagant. If he requires further information, I shall be delighted to provide it for him. He will, I am sure, recall that there has been a full debate on the matter in the House, and I think that I am right in saying that the overwhelming majority of hon. Members were in favour of the building going ahead.

Mr. MacShane: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that many hon. Members are still working in offices, with members of their staff, in conditions that are wholly illegal? Given that not 100 yd from here there is another, largely unused Chamber with many offices around it, will he invite his honourable—in the full sense—and noble Friends to vacate those premises until such time as all democratically elected Members of Parliament have proper office facilities of their own?

Mr. Channon: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his kind suggestion, but I am not sure that I am the best person to undertake that rather sensitive and difficult task.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I accept that there must be value for money in any public sector or, indeed, private sector building project, but does my right hon. Friend agree that the new building is to be on one of the finest and most important sites in London and that it would be quite wrong for it to be built as cheaply as possible with poor quality materials? Does he agree that it is absolutely essential to use good quality materials so that the building will last for all time?

Mr. Channon: My hon. Friend, with his architectural experience, puts his finger on the main point. It is essential that we do not ruin this very fine site so near the Palace of Westminster. I hope that the right balance has been achieved and that we shall have a building of high quality at reasonable cost.

Works of Art

33. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, what recent provisions have been made in the past two financial years for acquisitions of works of art. [7474]

Mr. A. J. Beith (On behalf of the House of Commons Commission): The financial provision for works of art in 1994-95 was £37,000, including some £17,000 specifically for 7 Millbank. In 1995-96, the provision is £50,000.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: May I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that answer? He will be aware of the admirable work done by the House of Commons Works of Art Committee, chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack), especially in commissioning works to fill gaps that have been identified for this century. Will the right hon. Gentleman assure the House that the Commission will seek adequate funding for the new parliamentary building so that similar gaps do not appear in the next century?

Mr. Beith: The experience of 7 Millbank and 1 Parliament street suggests that the Commission and the Finance and Services Committee will try to meet reasonable requirements to display good works of art in the new building. I know that the Works of Art Committee works hard and drives a hard bargain on behalf of the House in trying to make that possible.

Disabled Visitors' Facilities

34. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, what representations he has had about facilities for disabled constituents visiting and lobbying hon. Members. [7476]

Mr. Beith: In the past 12 months, I have received representations from nine hon. Members in the form of parliamentary questions on the subject.

Mr. Skinner: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that there are several problems for disabled people who come to the House of Commons? Although it is a good idea to put them in Westminster Hall when it is raining so that they can get out of the bad weather, it is also important for disabled people to have the same rights as others to get into Central Lobby to lobby Members of Parliament. Is it not time that work was done to provide ramps at St. Stephen's Entrance and Central Lobby to give disabled people the same rights as others?

Another place to put disabled people has just crossed my mind: we could stick them in the House of Lords as there are now moves to get rid of the peers.

Mr. Beith: The House's advisers on such matters, and the Committees involved, have not been convinced that it would be possible to put ramps up to Central Lobby from St. Stephen's Entrance, and we have gone to considerable trouble to provide alternative routes.

It is possible to accommodate a larger number of people in Westminster Hall than can be accommodated in Central Lobby at any time. Those facilities were appreciated.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Can the right hon. Gentleman confirm that proper thought is being given to providing toilets and catering facilities for disabled people who come to Westminster Hall? They are often uncomfortable, and something should be done about it.

Mr. Beith: The object of the Commission is to ensure that disabled people can gain access to all necessary parts of the House, including the restaurants and catering facilities. A great deal of work has gone on, including work to improve lifts so that they are suitable for disabled people. The Commission, when presented with practical proposals that are of help to disabled people, has never hesitated to seek the finance to get them under way.

Smoking

35. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, when the Commission will introduce a smoking policy into the office areas of the parliamentary estate. [7477]

Mr. Beith: The policy on smoking in offices of hon. Members and their staff is a matter for the Administration Committee, not the Commission. The Commission's policy, promulgated through the heads of Departments, is directed at discouraging smoking by its employees. It is left to individual heads of Departments to make arrangements by mutual agreement with staff for the restriction of smoking in offices. A separate and more stringent policy is, of course, applied in the Refreshment Department.

Mrs. Campbell: As the dangers of passive smoking are now so well documented, does the right hon. Gentleman believe that it is appropriate to protect the employees of the House of Commons from passive smoking, for instance in the Library area and in office areas occupied by right hon. and hon. Members? Is it right that people in their workplace should be forced to breathe in the smoke of other people?

Mr. Beith: I do not think that it is right for people in their working environment to be forced to inhale smoke from other people. The Commission has not been notified of any case in which members of its staff are required to work in environments where smoking takes place. If there is an example, I would be grateful if the hon. Lady would draw it to my attention.

Mr. Matthew Banks: Although I do not pretend to defend smoke-filled offices or rooms in the Palace of Westminster, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that we would be far better off continuing the present policy of designating areas for smoking, so that members of staff have the right to choose?

Mr. Beith: My understanding is that in the Departments of the House members of staff do not inflict smoking on others, and where other occupants of an office are non-smokers, or simply prefer people not to smoke in the office, those smokers do not smoke there and seek suitable places to do so.

HMSO (Privatisation)

37. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, what representations he has received on the privatisation of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. [7479]

Mr. Beith: None, apart from those received during the debate on the privatisation of HMSO on 18 December 1995.

Mrs. Clwyd: When the only HMSO bookshop in Wales was shut, people were told to go to Bristol if they wanted to use HMSO's services. Can the right hon. Gentleman assure me that the same thing will not happen now and that the network of bookshops providing HMSO services will remain the same and in the same place?

Mr. Beith: The Commission cannot take responsibility for HMSO's retail network or the arrangements it has with retailers. The letter sent from Madam Speaker to the Ministry concerned contained the clear views of HMSO on how the House's requirements must be met. It has insisted at every stage that those requirements will be met. At the end of the day, it reserves the right to make whatever arrangements are necessary and appropriate to ensure that the House's publishing requirements are properly met.

Committees (Composition)

39. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what assessment he has made of the operation of the Standing Orders governing composition of Committees. [7481]

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I believe that the Standing Orders in general are operating satisfactorily, although some concerns have been expressed about the operation of Standing Order No. 86 in relation to a Standing Committee on a Welsh Bill. If the hon. Gentleman has some particular cause for concern, perhaps he could let me know.

Mr. Winnick: Standing Order No. 86 mentions the composition of Committees in relation to the House. Is it not a fact that the Government's overall majority has been reduced from 21 after the general election to just three now? Given that the Government's majority will be still less soon, even without further defections and the effect of Lady Thatcher's speech last week, why do the Government not do what the country desperately wants, and call an early general election now?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman may recall that the House spent some time on 11 January 1995 debating the interpretation of Standing Order No. 86 in particular circumstances. Beyond that, even the hon. Gentleman's wishful thinking will not have led him to expect me to comment on such a hypothesis.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in relation to Committees, what is most offensive is the behaviour of those Members who get elected on one ticket and then switch to another without being willing to fight a by-election? The electorate of Torridge and West Devon want such a by-election.

Mr. Newton: I have heard that view expressed in a number of quarters.

Parliamentary Business

40. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what arrangements are currently in place to announce the dates for all parliamentary business for 1996. [7482]

Mr. Newton: In my weekly business statement I announce business for the following week and give what information I can about business in the second week. Details of that second week's business are, of course, necessarily provisional and subject to change. I announced the proposed dates of the Easter recess on 22 November and I hope also to make an early announcement about the Whitsun recess.

Mr. Hughes: I do not want the Leader of the House to think that I am keen that there should be parliamentary business for the entire year. On the assumption that there may be such business, and building on the good work that the right hon. Gentleman has done in office, which has been accepted around the House, does he think that we will soon be like all other orderly institutions such as schools, colleges and universities in publishing an annual timetable with annual holiday dates, fixed in advance, and annual dates fixed in advance for events such as the Budget and other major events of the parliamentary year? Can we behave in the near future like most other responsible public institutions?

Mr. Newton: May I express my gratitude to the hon. Gentleman for the kindness of his introductory remarks? For the moment, I wish to proceed by consolidating on what I have achieved rather than engaging in the kind of further radicalism for which the hon. Gentleman calls.

Mr. Jessel: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that parliamentary business for 1996 will, before the end of the year, once again include the Budget? That would enable us most fully to discuss the policies of the Opposition, which would result in enormous tax increases.

Mr. Newton: I share my hon. Friend's warm anticipation of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor's next Budget.

EU Institutions

42. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what representations he has had regarding the importance of access by parliamentarians to EU institutions and to other European Union parliaments. [7484]

Mr. Newton: I have not had any recent representations on that matter.

Mr. Sheerman: The Lord President will be aware that many Labour Members who are pro-European are pro a democratic Europe, but not an Executive-driven Europe, and we believe that it is about time that domestic Parliaments' legislatures had access to Europe's institutions and not the measly one trip a year that is the current ration.

Mr. Newton: Over recent years, I have heard a number of suggestions on this matter, but none so far that seem to be sensible in relation to the purpose that the hon. Gentleman seeks.

Mr. Wilkinson: One trip a year is sufficient to understand what the purpose of the European Parliament is. Even to a casual visitor, it looks to be a towering Babel of neo-fascist proportions.

Mr. Newton: Knowing what I have heard over the years of my hon. Friend's views on these matters, I doubt whether he would have needed even one trip to form that conclusion.

Personal Statement

3.30 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Miss Ann Widdecombe): On Tuesday last—9 January—I answered a private notice question from the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) about the handcuffing of prisoners who attend hospital. It was in particular reference to the treatment of a prisoner from Holloway prison who had attended Whittington hospital to give birth. During that answer, I told the House that no concerns had been registered by the hospital about Holloway practice. I did so on the explicit advice of the Prison Service.

On 11 January, I received a letter from Baroness Hayman, chairman of the Whittington Hospital NHS trust, in which she told me that I had been misinformed about the hospital's position. She said that the chief executive of the hospital had written to the governor of Holloway on 31 August last year to convey the concerns of the staff of the maternity unit.

As a result, I have now personally reviewed all the correspondence between the Whittington and Holloway. With his letter of 31 August to the prison, the chief executive forwarded a letter that he had received from his director of women's health, and that did express concerns over the practice.

The letter of 31 August was followed by further correspondence and meetings. The latest exchange was a letter received at the prison last Tuesday, of which I was unaware until after my reply to the private notice question. That letter was from the chief executive to the new governor offering to discuss a number of options.

I deeply regret that the advice that I had been given about this correspondence—and which I in turn gave to the House in all good faith—was wrong and I offer my unreserved apologies to the House.

Madam Speaker: The House will be most grateful to the hon. Lady.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I know that it would be improper to question the contents of a personal statement, but what we have just heard is a statement, not a personal statement, and its contents should have been subject to questioning by the House of Commons. We have just seen an abuse of a personal statement in the House.

Madam Speaker: That is not at all correct. I accepted it as a personal statement. As such, it had to be heard in silence and with no comment afterwards.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. We have just heard the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) refer to the European Parliament, in which elected representatives from this country sit, as a neo-fascist institution, a description endorsed by the Lord President of the Council. Given that the Prime Minister wants closer co-operation between the House and the European Parliament to oversee European matters, I invite the Lord President not to endorse his hon. Friend's description of the European Parliament as a neo-fascist institution.

Mr. Newton: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. As the hon. Gentleman will find as soon as he reads the text in *Hansard*, I in no way endorsed that comment.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Although I accept fully your ruling that personal statements cannot be questioned, I seek your advice on a matter relating to the shackling of pregnant women in Holloway, or anyone else. What methods are open to Members who would like to question the Minister of State and her odious boss on that uncivilised and barbaric practice?

Madam Speaker: Adjournment debates are open to all hon. Members, as are parliamentary questions to Home Office Ministers. I am sure that the hon. Lady knows the methods that we have in the House whereby Back Benchers can question Ministers on a variety of matters.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I politely ask you whether the statement by the Minister of State, Home Office, the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), was seen by you before she made it?

Madam Speaker: Yes, it was.

Orders of the Day

Finance Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

3.35 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. William Waldegrave): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

In his three Budgets, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has built the foundations for sustainable growth, with low inflation, which will lead to higher living standards for all in this country. The economic fundamentals of the economy are now firmly established. Output is almost 6 per cent. higher than its previous peak, with steady growth forecast to continue. Inflation is enjoying its best run for almost 50 years and we are on course to meet our target of underlying inflation of 2½ per cent. or less. Unemployment has fallen by more than 730,000, with 250,000 new jobs created in the past year. Interest rates are low and people's mortgage rates are at their lowest for 30 years.

The 1995 Budget, of which the Bill is the central part, maintains the strategy. It takes no risks with the recovery, but starts to cut taxes, based on the good control of spending. It makes real further progress towards our goal of making Britain the enterprise centre of Europe. It keeps us on course for a low-spending, low-tax economy which fosters enterprise and lets people take their own decisions with their own money, in complete contrast to the Opposition's plans.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Why did the Budget not contain any strategy for Britain's manufacturing industry?

Mr. Waldegrave: Absolutely central to this year's Budget and to previous Budgets is a strategy for Britain's industry: a strategy of lower interest rates, an enterprise economy, deregulation and competition—all the things about which the Labour party is suspicious in its bones.

We are on course to reduce the share of national income taken by the state to below 40 per cent. of gross domestic product by 1997-98, making Britain the best place in Europe in which to employ people and to invest. That has been done while finding additional resources for the services that people care most about—the health service, schools and the police. There is another £900 million for schools, there are another 5,000 police officers and there are almost 4,000 more prison places. There are 10,000 extra closed-circuit television cameras in town centres. Current spending on the NHS is to increase by £1¼ billion next year—1½ per cent. in real terms.

Mr. Sheerman: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that people care very much for their university sector? Does he believe that a 7 per cent. cut in the universities' budgets will help either higher education or an enterprise economy, let alone the enterprise centre of Europe? Universities are increasingly at the cutting edge of the new technology that produces the wealth creation ability of our country.

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman has made a useful point to which I shall return. Although the Labour party has not voted against the tax cuts, it opposes each of the spending restraints on which those tax cuts are based. That is the fundamental incoherence at the heart of the Opposition's position. The universities, which are well placed and skilful in terms of raising money from the private market, have been required to do more and I am sure that they will be able to do so.

To achieve the strategy that I have set out, we have had to take tough decisions, one of which the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) has just referred to, about priorities and about reducing expenditure elsewhere. We aim to reduce fraud in social security, for example, by £2½ billion a year within the next three years. We have redoubled our pressure on central Government costs. We plan a reduction in the real costs of Whitehall of more than 12 per cent. over the period. Although much more can of course be done—by greater efficiency, competitive tendering, contracting out, and increasingly by the private finance initiative and challenge funding—tough decisions on priorities must be made; reining back individual programmes that are not of the highest priority.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Although the Budget was cheered to the echo by Tory Members of Parliament at the time, it has been a total flop in the country. Will the Minister explain why that is so?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am in danger of reading out the several pages of congratulations from industry and others, including the Confederation of British Industry, the heads of many great firms and some editorials of newspapers sympathetic to the Labour party, with which I have been provided, but in order not to embarrass the hon. Gentleman, I shall not do so now.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose—*

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is always helpful. I will always give way to him—well, not always, but mostly.

Mr. Skinner: Has the Minister received any letters from any prison officers about the state of their jobs? If the Budget was so good and the country's economy is in such good shape, why have the Government announced that 3,000 prison officers are to get the sack? Surely when the Home Secretary is talking about increasing the prison population, it is scandalous to be putting 3,000 people on the dole if, as the Minister is saying, the country's economy is in good shape. How has that happened?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman straightforwardly, openly and honestly speaks—and I think would be proud to speak—for the voice of the public sector trade unions on this matter and many others. I think that he would regard it as an insult if I said that he did anything other. We take a different approach. We believe that there are major efficiency gains to be made in the prison services as elsewhere. Private sector prisons have demonstrated greater efficiency than those retained and run directly in the traditional way. That is why we can achieve the objective of more prison places, which we unfortunately need, while making economies.

[Mr. Waldegrave]

Every one of those economies—Labour Members have been helpful enough to demonstrate that already in the debate—is opposed openly, or sometimes after talking to the pressure groups concerned, by the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats. Without those economies, the tax cuts in the Budget are not affordable. Those tax cuts are right for the economy. They build incentives and encourage enterprise. They help individuals, families, pensioners, business men and entrepreneurs to keep more of what they earn or have built up through work, saving and creating wealth and employment. Without the cuts in spending plans, which finance the tax cuts, those tax cuts would not be affordable.

That is the hypocrisy of Labour Members: supporting the tax cuts yet arguing day after day against the measures that make those tax cuts affordable.

Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe (Bradford, South): What good are tax cuts to people out of work? Is not the Government's economic strategy about having a pool of unemployed people? What will the Budget do—and what is the Minister going to do—to create jobs?

Mr. Waldegrave: We believe that the way in which to create jobs—this is perhaps one of the real divides between the Conservative party and the Labour party—is to make it economic and affordable to employ people, by cutting the costs of employment. We have therefore achieved the lowest level of unemployment of the big economies in Europe. All the policies for which the Labour party argues would turn that round and send our unemployment towards the levels in France, Germany, Spain and the other countries in Europe where such policies, which make it difficult to employ people, are followed.

The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe) and especially Opposition Members who consistently sit below the Gangway believe that the state can create jobs.

Mr. Skinner: Of course.

Mr. Waldegrave: That is the proper divide between us. "Of course", says the hon. Member for Bolsover. We do not believe that. We believe that enterprise creates jobs. That is the heart of our strategy.

Part of the overall economic strategy was the cut in interest rates announced in December. That reduction, fully consistent with meeting our inflation target, means that mortgage rates have fallen to their lowest level for a generation. There is more good news ahead. In the spring, households in England and Wales will receive a rebate of over £50 on their electricity bills following the recent flotation of the national grid. There are also maturing tax-exempt special savings accounts, or TESSAs—a Government invention—to consider, with investments worth about £15 billion being unfrozen in the first quarter of this year. That is all in addition to the tax cuts announced in the Budget.

A number of surveys show that the views of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor about the growth of consumer spending and of the economy this year look more and more justified. The House can be assured that the strategy embodied in the Bill will keep the British economy strong and that it promises excellent prospects for the coming year—the fourth year of growth since the recession.

My right hon. and learned Friend had three main aims in his Budget tax measures—first, to help people to keep more of what they earn and save; secondly, to protect family savings; and, thirdly, to continue to reinforce Britain's status as the enterprise centre of Europe.

Mr. Skinner: Sounds good.

Mr. Waldegrave: It is good.

The Finance Bill contributes to all my right hon. and learned Friend's aims. It starts with a cheerful clause on which I am sure I can unite the House—the first cut in whisky tax for 100 years. As a former Agriculture Minister, I know the importance of that great industry for both Scotland and the United Kingdom as a whole, so there could not be a better way to start a Finance Bill.

After dealing with various other duties, the Bill reduces income tax. When we came to power, the basic rate of income tax was 33 per cent. and the higher rates rose to 83 per cent. on earnings and 98 per cent. on what Labour called unearned income—an unpleasant euphemism for the interest on people's savings. That was the punitive tax system under Labour. It was hostile to people who wanted to work hard and do well and savage for people who wanted to set aside a little for their old age. During the past 16 years, Conservative Governments have cut the basic rate to 25 per cent. and the higher rate to 40 per cent. We have stopped the surcharge on savers. The Bill goes further and takes significant steps towards the Government's clear target of moving towards a 20 per cent. basic rate of income tax as soon as possible. Clause 64 reduces the basic rate to 24 per cent. It also widens the lower rate band by £700—£500 more than indexation. Clause 65 and schedule 5 reduce the tax on savings income to 20 per cent. for basic rate taxpayers. Clause 66 increases personal allowances by £100 more than indexation.

In all, 26 million income tax payers and 14 million savers will be better off and 220,000 people—low earners and pensioners—will be freed from tax altogether.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): In view of the rosy picture that the Minister is painting, can he explain the persistent absence of any feel-good factor among the people whom we represent? More specifically, can he explain the results of an opinion poll among parents who were asked whether they thought their children faced a better or worse future than they had faced, when 18 per cent. said that they thought it would be better, but 63 per cent. thought it would be worse? Is not it a unique achievement of the Government that under them, alone among Governments in our history, people are now rather fearful of being young?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman should cast his mind back to the 1970s when the Labour party ran the country and we were genuinely at the bottom of all the league tables, with about 1 per cent. growth a year and virtually no growth in real personal disposable incomes. People's future and their hopes for the future are far better based today than they were under Labour.

In parallel with the income tax changes, 3 million self-employed taxpayers will benefit under the Bill. The 1p off the small companies rate of corporation tax in clause 70 will benefit more than 300,000 small companies. The extension of the business rates transitional scheme—which is not in the Bill—will help

800,000 businesses. Those measures, together with the changes to inheritance tax in clause 169 onwards, and to capital gains tax in clauses 163 and 164, offer practical help to businesses, as does the cut in the employers' national insurance charge.

Mr. Winston Churchill (Davyhulme): I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the impact of the landfill tax on port dredgings and, in particular, the operation of the Manchester ship canal. The idea behind the landfill tax is clearly environmental, with the aim of discouraging tipping. However, in the case of port dredgings—and in particular the Manchester ship canal—there is nowhere else to tip because the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will not allow tipping in the North sea or St. George's channel. The impact of the tax, as conceived in the Bill, will be a £4.7 million additional burden each year, which will drive the company into deficit, could lead it to bankruptcy and could result in the flooding of many tens of thousands of homes in the Greater Manchester area.

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend, who is a powerful voice for Manchester and the region, makes a point that will be properly debated on the Floor of the House, at which point it will be carefully considered by my hon. Friends and me.

The Budget proposed two sets of measures to help to protect family savings and addressed many families' concerns about the cost of caring for elderly relatives in residential or nursing homes. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor announced that he would exempt from tax a range of insurance policies that provide long-term care benefits, and that was widely welcomed. Those measures are contained in clause 134.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): Will the Chief Secretary explain the Government's housing benefit policy, which I gather will double the rents of the poorest people of this country in many council areas?

Mr. Waldegrave: There is no need for that to happen. As far as I recall, the public expenditure settlement does not propose an additional guideline rent increase. I would be surprised if the hon. Gentleman is correct, but it depends on the behaviour of individual local authorities.

My right hon. and learned Friend explained that from April—and sooner if practicable—the Government would more than treble to £10,000 the level of assets below which people would be required to make no contribution from their capital to the cost of long-term care, and would double the upper threshold above which full contributions are required to £16,000. That is not in the Bill as it is a public spending measure, but I can reassure the House that the necessary preparations are being made and that the regulations will be introduced as soon as possible.

The Budget also addressed the concerns that people have about their ability to pass on more to their children and their families. As my right hon. and learned Friend said, it is a myth that inheritance tax affects only the very rich, who are better placed to dispose of their assets before death. It is middle Britain—those with a house and a few modest investments—that is under threat as a result of inheritance tax. Clause 169 alleviates that by increasing the threshold from £154,000 to £200,000. The number paying inheritance tax will be reduced by a third. Only one in 45 estates will now pay any tax, and all estates will pay less.

To continue our successful campaign to make Britain the enterprise centre of Europe, the Government aim to have a tax system that encourages wealth creation and keeps business taxes and employment costs low. New taxes are seldom seen to help in that, but the landfill tax does. It shifts costs from making it expensive to employ people to making it more expensive to create waste. That is obviously good environmentally, and it enables us to cut employers' national insurance contributions by 0.2 per cent. to 10 per cent. from April 1997.

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): May I declare an interest, as I am a former director of the Manchester ship canal company? May I follow up what my hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) said? The landfill tax may be an additional tax, but it is certainly a further burden on business. If such dredging is to be environmentally sound, should it not take place ashore rather than out to sea? The Minister said that the matter will be debated. Is he sympathetic to the view that dredging that is carried out ashore should be exempt from landfill tax?

Mr. Waldegrave: I will not say off the cuff whether I am sympathetic to that view or not. The debate is clearly a serious one, and it is interesting that the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) is backing my hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill), who he called his hon. Friend. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not giving a dangerous implication for the future. In this instance, I think that that would be very unlikely.

The cut in national insurance contributions reduces by £500 million the cost of employing people in this country. This contrasts starkly with Labour's plans, every one of which—including the social chapter and the minimum wage—would make it more expensive to employ people, and thus put unemployment here up to French, Spanish and German levels. More jobs means real stakeholding, to coin a phrase.

The next related measure builds on our achievement of giving employees a true stake in their companies by employee share ownership. That is why my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a package of changes in the Budget which are designed to encourage more companies to set up employee share schemes, particularly for their lower-paid employees, and to encourage employees to participate in those schemes. Clauses 102 to 111 set out the necessary changes to the law. As the chief executive of the organisation Proshare said:

"This is the best budget for employee share ownership that we have seen in many years".

The Finance Bill is not just about the headline Budget measures, important as those are. It is about the good management of the tax system. The Bill contains measures to modernise and simplify the tax system and, like every other Finance Bill, to block loopholes. Clauses 72 to 97, for example, introduce a new system for tax and corporate loan relationships. The existing relationships and arrangements are a constraint on business, but they also give some businesses the opportunity to avoid tax.

The changes in the Bill will bring the tax system into line with commercial reality and will enable companies to organise their affairs more flexibly. It may seem unlikely at first sight, but those clauses also constitute a

[Mr. Waldegrave]

simplification of the tax system. Although the Bill contains almost 100 pages of measures on that subject, much of this consists of transitional arrangements. Once the new system is bedded in, we will have replaced 100 pages of tax law with 40 pages, which is a net reduction of 60 pages. Another large and complex block of the Bill—clauses 112 to 133—sets out further provisions on self-assessment and completes what was done in the last two Finance Acts.

Our Finance Bill takes forward a coherent and successful strategy for the British economy. We heard no alternative strategy from Labour in the Budget debate, which was not surprising. We are used to that, and I doubt whether we will hear a strategy today. The truth is that Labour's approach is riddled with contradictions. The first contradiction—

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Waldegrave: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will let me develop the argument a little. The first contradiction, as the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone)—whom I do not see in his place today—said with his usual candour, is that the Leader of the Opposition's main strategy is to say anything he can think of to reassure Tory voters. His latest ploy is to start praising no less a person than Lady Thatcher and the measures on privatisation and trade union reform, among others, which she took in the 1980s.

Meanwhile, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), with his league tables, has said that everything that has happened since 1979 has been a failure. An article in *The Wall Street Journal* last Saturday said that that was both "contradictory and devious" and that:

"If the policies didn't work, why does a socialist party need to perform ideological contortions by adopting them? If they have been successful"—

the article argued that they had been, and I would certainly agree—

"wouldn't the debate over the real policy options available to Britain become more informed and transparent"

if Labour openly admitted it?

The second contradiction is that Labour has lost its nerve about admitting the higher spending, higher borrowing and higher taxation which follows from everything its spokesmen and spokeswomen say. I shall take one example, of many.

I am sorry to keep picking on the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) in this matter, but unlike most Labour Front Benchers she at least shows signs of life and says things. In the Budget debate, she forced me to withdraw my disgraceful allegation that she had called for more spending on health, which I did at once—although the idea that she is not in favour of more health spending strikes those of us in Bristol who have heard her on such matters as odd.

The hon. Member for Bristol, South has had something else to say, this time about education. She has written round Bristol saying that another £16 million is needed for education in the city. *[Interruption.]* I shall not withdraw this one because I have the letter here. That letter, from a Front-Bench spokesperson, is presumably at least some sort of commitment. It has inevitably been taken as a commitment by the school governors and parents who received her letter.

The increase, however, surely cannot be just for Bristol, however faithful the hon. Member for Bristol, South is to her constituents. If she is promising a cap which allows an 8 per cent. increase in spending for Bristol, in all fairness she must promise the same for other local authorities, which would be £2.3 billion on public spending—or a penny ha'penny on income tax.

Ms Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): I have to clarify and correct what the Chief Secretary has said. The Chief Secretary wrote to every board of school governors in Bristol to say that Bristol had an extra £4 million to spend on education because the SSA had increased by that much. The Chief Secretary did not understand that Bristol was already spending £16 million above its SSA on education. There was therefore still a shortfall. I have merely pointed out that he does not understand education spending in the city that he claims to represent, and which he does so poorly.

Mr. Waldegrave: I would never say to an hon. Member that he or she did not represent their constituents properly. I am sure that the hon. Lady represents her constituency admirably; I have often heard it said by her predecessor, who has expressed to me very interesting opinions on that matter.

I believe it was another of Lord Cocks of Hartcliffe former colleagues, Lord Healey, who said that when one is in a hole, the best thing to do is to stop digging. The hon. Lady made it clear in her letter, which I have before me, that she has given the nod and the wink to the people in Bristol that the amount spent on education is inadequate for the needs of Bristol.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: Why is the right hon. Gentleman picking on her?

Mr. Waldegrave: I mention it, and I pick on the hon. Member for Bristol, South, only because I happen to be familiar with her argument—

Ms Primarolo: Because I sent the letter to you.

Mr. Waldegrave: And because she did me the courtesy of sending it to me.

I am sure that my hon. Friends know of many other examples throughout the country of local spokesmen saying to the pressure groups, "Yes; more money" after which, if we challenge them in the House, Labour Front Bench spokesmen—sometimes the same people—say, "Oh no, we did not mean that". It would be braver, and Labour Members sitting below the Gangway would like it, if Labour Front Bench spokesmen said, "Let us have the spend", because that is what the spokesmen below the Gangway say. It cannot be only for Bristol.

Mr. Betts *rose—*

Mr. Skinner *rose—*

Mr. Waldegrave: I give way to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts).

Mr. Betts: While he is discussing education, will the Chief Secretary reflect on the evidence that he gave to the Treasury Select Committee a couple of weeks ago? When we asked how that extra so-called "money for education" had been calculated, he could not say that it was in any way related to the needs of education, to the additional pupils who will attend schools next year, to the teachers'

pay award, to inflation or to any other meaningful figure that affects daily life in our schools. He simply said that that was a figure that had been arrived at during a meeting between himself and the Secretary of State for Education and Employment.

Is it any wonder, therefore, that when letters such as the one that he sent to schools are received, schools throughout the country do not respond to them as any more than Conservative propaganda unrelated to the needs that school governors, parents and teachers experience in our schools today?

Mr. Waldegrave: There is another example, coming from the former sponsor of the great student games in Sheffield. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that more should be spent on education this year? If so, let him say so; but he will not say so. Is he saying perhaps that too much is being spent? He will not say so. That is at the heart of the equivocation that gives so much pain to Labour Members sitting below the Gangway. Labour Front Bench spokesmen will not say that they will spend more on anything; they have not voted against the tax cuts. They are therefore adopting our strategy, and the hon. Member for Bolsover is in a high old rage.

Mr. Skinner: No; I am not. I feel no pain. I have listened carefully to the exchange. I have reached the conclusion that what my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) said was not dissimilar to what a lot of Labour Members have said—that when the Tory Government said in their Budget that they were going to increase the amount of money for education, we found out in 24 hours, having considered the facts and figures, that schools would be about £40 per pupil worse off than they were before.

I do not expect the right hon. Gentleman to understand that. He went to Eton. He is educated beyond his intelligence.

Mr. Waldegrave: That is an unwarranted attack on the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson).

The hon. Member for Bolsover makes my argument for me. He is unwilling to say—or perhaps he is willing to say, but Labour Front Bench spokesmen certainly are not—whether Labour intends to spend more on education this year. The Front Bench spokesmen will not say.

Mr. Skinner: I voted for that.

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman had the consistency to vote against the income tax cuts, and that makes him someone who it is at least worth debating with. It is not worth debating with Labour Front Bench spokesmen because, although they sometimes quietly say that they want more spent, they did not vote against the income tax cuts.

It is not really fair to blame the hon. Member for Bristol, South—or even the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, who is not in his place—for the incoherence at the heart of Labour's position. They would probably run their party differently if they had the chance. The incoherence comes from the top—what the hon. Member for Bolsover, in a memorable phrase, called "the sirloin tendency" in the Labour party.

We all know why the "stakeholder" soundbite was deployed. It is because it can mean two completely different things to two different audiences. To the floating voter, it can be made to sound like the good old Conservative idea of the property-owning democracy—a central theme of Toryism, from Lord Randolph Churchill via Rab Butler to Lady Thatcher and the present Prime Minister—wider ownership of homes, shares and pension funds. There is nothing threatening in that, which is why the phrase was used.

To the soft left the phrase can be dressed up to sound like Will Hutton or Andrew Gamble or any of the old leftist think-tankers—a miasma of failed corporatist wheezes and schemes all involving more legislation and costs imposed by politicians and civil servants on business. It is the same old stuff that Labour sought, with disastrous results, to introduce in the 1970s, when this country was at the bottom of the league tables.

When the Leader of the Opposition is challenged, as usual he slips away. Sir David Frost is told that "stakeholder" is only a slogan. It turns out that the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) and the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), who is in his place, are chairing working groups on corporate taxation and corporate governance which involve steering companies in the way that the Labour party, not the markets, want them to go on matters of dividend policy, investment, takeover policy and relationships with employees and suppliers—the same old issues.

How familiar it all sounds—it is familiar from the old days of Labour in the 1960s and 1970s. That is where we should be again if Labour ever came to power: there would be the old distrust of free enterprise; the old meddling from Whitehall and the old intervention. It would be a return to the old ways of decline and failure.

Our strategy is different: we believe in enterprise, competition and freedom—those are the only ways to achieve jobs and growth. The Bill embodies our principles and our practices. It is not just a matter of slogans, but of practical action. I commend the Bill to the House.

4.5 pm

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): I beg to move, To leave out from 'That' to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"this House declines to give a second reading to the Finance Bill because it fails to address the needs of the country for long-term investment, jobs and fairness in the interests of opportunities for all, and in particular does not include a welfare to work strategy paid for by a windfall levy on the monopolistic profits of the privatised utilities, fairness measures to cut VAT on fuel for domestic and charitable use or to implement in full the Greenbury Report, investment measures including adequate reform of the Private Finance Initiative and does not address the burdens on tax-payers, especially small businesses and the self-employed arising from the introduction of self-assessment."

The Finance Bill is the dull product of a tired and divided party—and it shows. Like the Budget to which it gives effect, the Bill fails to match the challenges that confront our country or the potential of our people. Our amendment sets out the central grounds of our argument: the Bill fails to address the pressing needs of the country.

The Chief Secretary's speech said much more about the Government's complacency than the Bill's content. The House could have expected more than muddled quotations from *The Wall Street Journal* and unfounded allegations about nods and winks in Bristol. Even as he spoke, his claims were challenged by the report published today by the Treasury Select Committee, which represents a damning indictment of the Government's economic record.

[Mr. Andrew Smith]

The report underlines concern on the economic strategy being pursued by the Government. On the latest figures for growth for 1996, the Committee observed "scepticism rather than assent". The report calls into question the basis of the Chancellor's investment forecast; it accuses him of wishful thinking and over-optimism, grounded in his forecast last year of a 10.75 per cent. increase in business investment, which turned out to be 3.25 per cent. The Committee also remains sceptical on the investment forecasts this year.

More accusations of wishful thinking occur over the Treasury's forecasts for the housing market. The forecasts were criticised for putting a gloss on "major areas of concern". The report questions the Government's record on public finances, citing the slippage in the public sector borrowing requirement from the previous year's estimates as

"the biggest disappointment in this year's Budget".

The Chief Secretary's claims that all is well with the economy are contradicted by the Select Committee as well as by people's everyday experience and by the facts. He cannot be allowed to hide behind his carefully constructed smokescreen of selective statistics. He must explain why Britain still has 2.2 million people unemployed, why 800,000 people have been out of work for more than a year, and why 600,000 young people are without a job.

The right hon. Gentleman must explain why people feel so insecure and why living standards fell last year as real disposable income in the third quarter was lower than at the beginning of the year. He must explain why housing repossessions were as high as 25,000 in the first half of 1995, and why negative equity continues to afflict more than 1 million home owners.

The right hon. Gentleman makes claims, as the Government always do, about inward investment. They must explain why 1994 saw the lowest level of inward investment for eight years, and why outward investment in the first three quarters of 1995 exceeded inward investment by more than £6 billion as compared with the net inflow of £8 billion when his right hon. Friend became Prime Minister.

Mr. Winnick: Apart from the devastation caused over the past 16 years in so many parts of the country, and certainly in the manufacturing sector in the west midlands, is my hon. Friend aware that, when I was out of the House during the 1970s, I worked in the Strand opposite the High Court, and that never once in all those years, in the day or the evening, did I see people sleeping on the streets or at Charing Cross station? When I go home in the evening after leaving here, I see a large number of people sleeping around the Strand and in Charing cross station simply because they have no alternative. Is that not one of the contrasts between the 1970s and now?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. If everything is going so wonderfully, why are people sleeping in the streets and begging? Why is there such evidence of the breakdown of social cohesion and the fragmentation of our society as a consequence of the Government's divided policies?

If everything is going so well on the economic front, why does Britain have the worst balance of trade figures for more than three years? Why do we have the lowest share of world trade this century? If the British people were listening to the Chief Secretary, they would be asking why, if everything is on course, they are paying so much more tax now than when the Prime Minister promised tax cuts year on year at the last general election, and why the Chancellor is forced to double public borrowing for the rest of the decade compared with what he was planning just a year ago.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): May I ask the hon. Gentleman a simple but fundamental question in the hope that I get a simple and straightforward answer? Does he consider that the present level of Government expenditure is too high, too low or exactly right?

Mr. Smith: Of course, the level of expenditure as a share of national product would be lower had the Government succeeded in reducing unemployment and removing the scandal of mass unemployment.

Mr. Davies: Answer the question.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman tries to interrupt from a sedentary position. The House should know about the pamphlet that he is writing for the Macleod group on the benefits of European integration. Perhaps we should hear more about that.

Mr. Waldegrave: Will the hon. Gentleman do my hon. Friend the courtesy of answering his question?

Mr. Smith: I have answered his question. *[Interruption.]*

If the Government are doing as well as the Chief Secretary claims in comparison to other countries, why, as the Governor of the Bank of England put it, are

"the chances . . . against the Government achieving their inflation target"?

Why are long-term interest rates so much higher in Britain than in Germany? Why has growth under the Government been lower in nearly all our main competitors, and why has Britain gone from 13th to 18th in the world prosperity league?

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Why does the hon. Gentleman think that the OECD survey of the British economy said:

"United Kingdom economic performance in 1994 was impressive"?

Mr. Smith: The OECD statistics show that the performance of the United Kingdom economy falls well below that of our major competitors in long-term growth, investment and training in the skills essential to our future economic well-being.

The Government's economic failure and incompetence have denied Britain the productive investment and quality training needed in today's global economy. They have secured insufficient capacity to get people into jobs and pay our way in the world and they have allowed an ever larger share of public spending to meet the costs of unemployment and poverty. The Government have taxed and borrowed hugely, not for investment in success, but to pay the bills of economic failure and social division.

It is against the test of a strategy for a strong economy and society that the Bill and the Government must be judged. We must judge what the Government have done for jobs, investment opportunities and fairness, and on each count they have failed.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): What is the hon. Gentleman's inflation target?

Mr. Smith: We want sustainably low inflation. I have quoted the Governor of the Bank of England, who has forecast that the Government will not hit their inflation target. The way to meet that target is to ensure levels of investment and capacity that will lead to efficient production and the ability to expand supply to meet demand, without running into inflation problems or balance of payments constraints.

Mr. Waldegrave: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman did not understand the question posed by my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn). He asked whether the target of 2.5 per cent. or lower is adequate.

Mr. Smith: The Government have demonstrated their unending confusion about what the inflation target really is, and the Chancellor has given various estimates. The Governor of the Bank of England has made it clear that the Government are not on course to hit their inflation target, because they have not taken the investment and training measures that we called for. They have not succeeded in getting people back to work to end the scandal whereby there are 1.2 million fewer people in work today than when the Prime Minister took office. One in five non-pensioner households has no one in work.

The costs of unemployment and low income-related benefits are eating up more than twice the share of gross domestic product than when the Conservatives came to office. In those circumstances, Britain needs a welfare-to-work strategy in order to get people off benefits and into jobs. There is no such strategy in the Bill.

Britain faces an investment crisis. Under this Government, Britain has fallen from 13th to 18th position in the world prosperity league. We are now 21st in the international league table for investment. Investment at this stage of the economic cycle is well below its level at a similar stage of any cycle this century.

In its report published today, the Treasury Select Committee castigates the Chancellor for his over-optimistic business investment forecast last year. If the Chancellor got it wrong so badly last year, we must ask how people can be confident that he and the Chief Secretary are correct this year. The private finance initiative is held back by tendering costs, complexity and a lack of clear priorities. In the face of that, Britain needs a concerted strategy to increase productive and profitable long-term investment in order to secure sustainable growth, rising living standards, quality of life and public services for the future. There is no such investment strategy in the Bill.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Given the hon. Gentleman's concern about the present level of investment, does he think that interest rates are too high? Would he reduce them? Does he believe that interest rates are too high, too low or about right?

Mr. Andrew Smith: I have already referred to the fact that, in Britain, long-term interest rates—which I am sure the hon. Member for Beaconsfield will agree are a very important measure of the market's future economic estimates—are much higher than those in Germany. If I recall the figures correctly, interest rates in this country are more than 25 per cent. higher than those in Germany.

We must decrease long-term interest rates and keep them low in order to create a low-inflation environment. That will be achieved through investment in capacity and training and the productivity and competitiveness of our economy, based on social cohesion and the knowledge that we, as members of society, depend one upon the other, economically and socially.

The Conservative party used to appreciate that in the days when the Chief Secretary spoke of his enthusiasm for "one nation" Conservatism. However, the Conservatives have now abandoned that approach, in a laissez-faire setting where one is pitted against another. That division in our society is causing much damage.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: The Conservatives say that they are running the economy well—I do not want to take my hon. Friend too far down that road—but I remind him that the botch-up that they caused through the poll tax has cost taxpayers £14 billion and that black Wednesday cost them nearly £4 billion.

Mr. Smith: Conservative Members and the Government have wasted incalculable sums on mistakes and disasters such as the poll tax and black Wednesday. They have failed to run the economy with a level of employment that can enable them to sustain healthy public finances. That is why they have been forced to raise taxes so much since the previous general election, so great is their failure on employment.

The Bill fails the crucial tests of jobs, investment and fairness. It fails—as do the Government—to pull the country together with opportunities for all. Where Britain needs to work together to win in the face of global competition, what do Conservative Members have to offer? Nothing but introspection, in-fighting and division: left from right, Macleod group from Way Forward group; Euro-sceptics from Euro-enthusiasts; and today's Prime Minister is undermined by the previous Tory leader and by the next—all half-dozen of them.

How ironic that the party that spent 16 years dividing the country is now applying the full force of that destructive talent on dividing itself. It is even fighting over the lurch to the right. Those who argue that it has gone too far confirm the people's verdict on the Tory record. Those who argue that it has not gone far enough confirm people's nightmare of any Tory future.

No wonder the north Oxfordshire Conservatives recently started an appeal letter with the stirring words:

"I am sure you will agree that the Conservative Party has taken a bit of a battering recently."

That was before Lady Thatcher's speech. The letter continued:

"We all need to draw on hidden strengths at some point in life, and that is why I am writing to you now".

So well hidden were those hidden strengths that the letter could not say what they were. Still, we must have some sympathy for the poor, battered north Oxfordshire agent. After all, what hidden strengths might he have turned to? Loyalty? Abandoned in today's Conservative party, as the battle for the succession hots up. Unity?

[Mr. Smith]

A cowardly cop-out from the ideological firmament needed to distil Conservative purity. One-nation Conservatism? The ultimate dirty word—cover for no-nation Euro-subservience.

The tragedy of today's Conservative party, in the Finance Bill and in everything else it does, is that it has allowed itself to be enticed down—

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can you confirm, as I have just entered the Chamber, that we are discussing the Finance Bill? I have heard nothing to do with the Finance Bill for many minutes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): I do not think that the hon. Gentleman has just entered the Chamber; he was here before I took over the Chair. I have been listening very carefully, and the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) has been in order. He referred to the Finance Bill. He nearly got outside it, but he referred to it, although very late.

Mr. Smith: The tragedy of today's Conservative party, in the Finance Bill and in everything else it does, is that it has allowed itself to be enticed down the road from one-nation Conservatism to the unthinking, uncaring free-for-all, where the only duty of Government is to hang on to power.

Lady Thatcher can talk. There are a few Conservative Members who know that she started it all when she said that there was no such thing as society. When social cohesion is weakened, as the Government have weakened it, and when broken promises, incompetence and weak leadership destroy confidence in what we can achieve together, there is nothing left but everyone out for themselves. That is how we end up with a Government who stumble from one crisis to another, whose only abiding function is survival, where the dismal calculus of avoiding defeat for the party always comes before the needs of the country.

Demoralised Conservative party members will search in vain for any hidden strengths, in the Finance Bill or anywhere else. I know Conservative Members who believe that rarely has so much paper, as in the Bill, included so little substance. It is extraordinary that a Government who are so long on the rhetoric of tax and regulation burdens on business should add so copiously to tax legislation: the longest Finance Bills ever produced have been introduced by them since the last general election.

Last year, we joined the hon. Member for Beaconsfield in defeating the Government on tax simplification; yet this year's Bill—the second longest presented to the House since the last election—shows how much further there is to go. According to the *Financial Times*, the former president of the Institute of Taxation read the Bill with "resignation and desperation", because of the underlying complexity of British tax law.

Although, for the first time, nine clauses and three schedules were drafted by private sector practitioners, there is no evidence that they were able to improve on the work of the Office of Parliamentary Counsel. The Chancellor's separate Budget proposal to rewrite the revenue tax code in plain English followed our own calls for simplification, and we support it, but the House will have to give careful consideration to how that is to be done. We shall need to examine how far clarification of the language can be achieved if the underlying tax structures and the literal interpretation of tax law are left unchanged. We shall seek further debate on that in Committee.

We shall scrutinise the Bill closely, and we shall take every opportunity to improve it as we improved last year's Bill. We shall continue to expose the Government's failure to implement the Greenbury report fully, or to get to grips with abuses in the privatised utilities. We shall press for full disclosure of directors' pension entitlements. Disclosure and transparency are sound principles, in the interests of shareholders and regulators as well as the general public.

We shall raise important questions in regard to the way in which the privatised utilities' affairs are being obscured from public scrutiny when they are incorporated as subsidiaries of larger groups. It cannot be right that, as the water regulator puts it,

"Without a listing requirement, a utility's operations could take place in darkness only penetrable by the regulator."

There is no doubt that the public want proper accountability and an end to abuses, and it is up to the House to ensure that they get that. It was the Labour party—speaking up for public opinion—that forced the need for action on to the agenda. We shall keep up the pressure until the people are given a fair deal.

We welcome the Government's climbdown on share options, but we shall scrutinise the detail of the Bill's proposals very closely. Our aim will be to promote wider shareholding and make opportunities available to employees, while ending the excesses that brought the executive share option scheme into such disrepute. We shall challenge aspects of the Bill that add to the burdens on business or damage job generation. We shall question the way in which the landfill levy has been introduced, and ask why the Chancellor described the cut in employers' national insurance contributions as a "matching cut" in his Budget speech, but does not match the timing in introducing those measures into law.

We are aware of the enormous challenge—already turning into an enormous burden—that businesses, especially small businesses and the self-employed, will face in the next year and beyond because of the way in which tax self-assessment is being introduced, and especially because it is being introduced at the same time as the shift from previous-year to current-year assessment. For a long time, Labour has warned of the enormous difficulties and costs that that can cause.

We are talking about a big switch in responsibilities from the Government to taxpayers, some 9 million of whom will become responsible for calculating their own tax liability. For businesses starting up, it involves a period of double taxation of profits which will be relieved only in future years; it puts new burdens on employers, who will have to take responsibility for quantifying the taxable value of benefits that they provide for employees, and who at the same time will face a new penalty regime for their pains, as unpaid tax collectors.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Perhaps the hon. Gentleman was just about to tell us, but what would he do differently? Would he postpone self-assessment for another year?

Mr. Smith: I was coming to that. There is a strong case for postponing the introduction of parts or all of

self-assessment. We shall table amendments in Committee, which is the proper place, in an attempt to relieve the burden that the proposal will undoubtedly impose on small businesses and the self-employed. We think that the Government are papering over the cracks and understating the complications and costs of the new system to the taxpayer.

The Inland Revenue's own compliance cost assessment admits to extra costs of between £130 million and £250 million a year, but assumes that they are going to be offset by savings on estimated assessments, postponements and appeals. Even if that is right—it sounds rather optimistic to me—there will be a period of double jeopardy as the new system comes in. The self-employed will still be tied up in delays, appeals and postponements under the old system, while they are simultaneously having to gear up to deal with the burdens of the new system. Furthermore, it seems likely that everyone will face the extra costs of complying with the new system, while the savings will be distributed more partially.

In addition, page 112 of the Red Book contains the revelation that the extra tax yield arising from self-assessment is going to be £850 million. That figure appears to arise in two ways: first from the effect of assessment of taxable profits on a current rather than a previous year basis, and secondly, because personal allowances will be set against the current rather than the previous year's profits. We shall debate in Committee the extent to which that will be a one-off or an on-going effect.

In any event, it means an extra £850 million tax take from schedule D taxpayers. It is a tax increase that the Government have tried to hide by smuggling it in the back door and hoping that no one will notice before the election.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Michael Jack): I have a straightforward question for the hon. Gentleman. I know that he has difficulty in dealing with this type of question, but I shall try again. I published a letter in *The Independent* which dealt point by point with the hon. Gentleman's allegations about self-assessment. I made it absolutely clear that profit growth accounted for the figure in the Red Book, and that there will be no double tax hit on companies. Does he agree with the analysis in that letter in *The Independent*? Did he even read it?

Mr. Smith: If the Financial Secretary expects me to read his letters, it would be good if he addressed them to me in future. I should then certainly read and study them. I did not see his letter in *The Independent*, but he cannot dispute what appears on page 112 of the Red Book. There is a list of all the measures arising from the Budget, along with a list of other revenue and cost effects. The lists reveal an extra £850 million tax yield. Before I issued the news release, I checked the figures with the Library, which in turn checked with the Inland Revenue. We shall examine in Committee whether that is a one-off or an on-going effect.

The fact is that taxation self-assessment is going to impose an enormous extra burden on small businesses and the self-employed. If the Financial Secretary and his colleagues do not believe that, they should talk to small business men and the self-employed in their own constituencies, who will tell them how great the extra burden will be. The Federation of Small Businesses, for example, said that it felt

"strongly that at least a transitionary period of two years should be put into place during which time there should be no recourse to hefty penalties for late returns."

Leading tax advisers are saying that the Government have not yet got the system right, and that there might well not be sufficient Inland Revenue staff available to give advice to sort things out.

The Bill contains 22 clauses on self-assessment, many of them dealing with matters that one might have expected the Government to get right. This is the final opportunity for the Government to avert what could well be a great disaster for the self-employed and small businesses and could have disastrous employment consequences in general. I invite the Government to join me in addressing the subject seriously and objectively, to get the proposals right in order to help the self-employed and small businesses that will otherwise face an intolerable burden.

Small businesses will get precious little help from other measures in the Budget. Although the cut in the small business tax rate is welcome, it must be set against the fact that the VAT registration threshold did not go up fully in line with inflation; that business rates will go up by 5 per cent. more than inflation; and that the knock-on effects of the landfill levy will kick in six months before the associated cuts in employers' national insurance.

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman may not yet have received the letter that I wrote to him in the spirit in which he put his arguments on self-assessment. I invited him to clarify any practical ideas he has. Will he give me an undertaking today to publish his ideas, if any, so that we might learn his policy, once and for all, on an issue that the Labour party has welcomed on principle in the two previous Finance Bills?

Mr. Smith: I am not sure whether the Financial Secretary means a separate letter from the one he sent to *The Independent*. In any event, I will read his letter when I receive it, and I am more than happy to set out our proposals. The Financial Secretary will find plenty of proposals in the amendments that we will table to the Finance Bill. The proposals will be on record in *Hansard* for him to read and thereby profit from. Let us hope that small businesses and the self-employed will benefit from our debate because the Government take notice of what we have said.

I shall now deal with the proposals in the Bill on housing investment. We welcome the principle of attracting private investment in housing, and we will explore how effective the proposals are likely to prove in practice. We will want to be assured that there are safeguards against abuse. We are concerned that the scheme is open-ended, because there appears to be no requirement that properties are held for any length of time. The implications for rent levels and the housing benefit subsidy are not clear.

How far might the investment trusts provide a shelter for former business expansion scheme properties? Do the proposals provide a double tax subsidy? Time and time again, we have seen tax breaks for property schemes in which costly concessions have been given for low-risk investment in properties with little or no housing, economic or social value. We need to be sure that the

[Mr. Smith]

proposals will not prove to be a repeat performance. We want to see a genuine partnership between the private and public sectors in the provision of affordable, good-quality housing, but housing companies must be a means of increasing supply and extending choice, not a vehicle for restricting them by privatising council housing.

There is nothing in the Bill to address effectively the problems of insecurity, negative equity and still high levels of mortgage repossessions. Conservative Members may be inclined to point to changes in personal taxation, but people have got back but a small fraction of the extra taxation that the Government have imposed since 1992. Typical families are still paying some £600 more a year in taxes than at the time of the general election, when the Prime Minister promised tax cuts year on year.

We welcome the fact that fear of an electorate that has been hit with 21 tax increases since the general election has forced the Government to give a little back. However, even that little is being eaten away by extra demands for everything from the council tax to rail fares.

The lower tax rate on savings and the exemption of insurance benefits arising from long-term care will provide modest help. However, those proposals do not begin to address the real challenge of reforming the welfare and pensions systems to ensure that everyone has the chance of a rewarding working life, and dignity and security in retirement.

The mere fact that the Government have made it clear in the Bill that compensation for mis-sold personal pensions should be exempt from tax—a scandal for which the Conservative Government must accept their share of responsibility—is a reminder that people cannot place their trust for the future in a party that has got it so wrong in the past.

The Finance Bill is profoundly disappointing, even if the sins of omission are greater than those of commission. It has all the hallmarks of a tired, frightened Government, who have no new ideas to revitalise a sluggish economy. They have no vision to bring together a divided society or to embark on the training and investment revolution that Britain needs.

This is not a Finance Bill for jobs, investment or fairness. It does nothing to advance the opportunities for everyone to make the most of his potential with a true stake in society. It does nothing to build a strong economy or a fair society, still less to recognise how far one depends on the other. For all those reasons, as set out in our amendment, the Opposition will reject the Bill in the Lobby tonight, as surely as the British people want rid of the failed and divided Government who produced it.

4.40 pm

Mr. David Hunt (Wirral, West): I find it difficult to follow the first two speeches because they appear to have been delivered by people living on different planets.

The first speech delivered by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury was based in the real world—a world in which the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury have regaled for us economic statistics better than I can ever remember in my political lifetime. Indeed, the Opposition had no real answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin), who pointed out not only that the statistics are put forward by the Government but corroborated by the OECD. I cannot recall a time when we had better conditions for sustaining a period of non-inflationary growth.

We then had the speech from the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith). I believed that his amendment promised much, but delivered very little in his speech. Many of us waited with some expectation for the details of the welfare to work initiative to be given in the debate. Perhaps they may be published during the proceedings on the Finance Bill—I very much hope so. We have heard reference again to a one-off tax, but, by definition, one cannot build an alternative economic strategy on a windfall tax. The Opposition, however, seem once again just to have taken refuge in a series of soundbites.

The Leader of the Opposition has become a master of the double entendre. He is a leading politician who needs spin doctors to explain everything he says. As my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary pointed out clearly, the stakeholder economy can mean two different things at least. Therefore we need explanations, but today there came none. I greatly regret that.

I just want to make two points. First, I congratulate the Chancellor on what I believe to be a one-nation Budget. I challenge what the hon. Member for Oxford, East said about the Conservatives allegedly having deserted one-nation Toryism. That could not be further from the truth.

As I said, the first two speeches in the debate appeared to have been delivered by people living on different planets. That very phrase was used by Benjamin Disraeli in "Sybil", chapter five, book II, when he wrote:

> "Two nations between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones or inhabitants of different planets . . . the rich and the poor."

In chapter eight, book I, Disraeli wrote:

> "I was told that the Privileged and the People formed two nations."

The desire to overcome that difference has been the theme running through my strong belief in Conservatism and Christian democracy. I see it very much in the Budget. I recall on a previous occasion when my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor said that one of his clear objectives was to ensure that we did not have developing within the United Kingdom the sort of underclass that we have seen develop in the United States. The Budget and the Finance Bill do much to ensure that that will never happen here.

Just after the war a group of eminent Conservatives published a pamphlet entitled "One Nation". In the subtitle it described itself as

> "a Tory approach to social problems."

That group of Conservative members included the former Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) and Enoch Powell, Iain Macleod, Angus Maude and others. One-nation Toryism is not the possession of the left, the centre or the right. It is fundamental to Conservatism. I wanted to echo that message in the debate and put the record straight.

Members of the Opposition have used the phrase "one nation" as though it was the latest thing in soundbites without realising that it is fundamental to many of our beliefs in politics.

Secondly, I also believe that this is a Budget for jobs. I come from an area where we have had a high level of unemployment for far too long, going back beyond when I first came into the House 20 years ago. That high rate of average unemployment has also contained pockets of extremely high levels of unemployment, which have done a great deal to undermine the social fabric of society. It is the Tory approach to those problems that provides the answer.

In his Budget, the Chancellor clearly defined the social market. Of course we must allow the market to produce the wealth so that we can then afford the social policies that enable us to ensure fundamentally that we are one nation.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): I wonder how the right hon. Gentleman squares his belief in one-nation Toryism with the findings of the Rowntree Trust's commission on wealth? That revealed that during the period in which he sat in Cabinet for many years the gulf between rich and poor throughout Britain, including Wales, was substantial.

Mr. Hunt: Different interpretations have been put on that Rowntree report, but it demonstrated clearly, as John Rawls has always said about the social market justifying the market, that the poor are now better off than they have been before. It may be that in certain circumstances the gap between rich and poor has increased, but the justification for the market is that it ensures that people are better off, and in particular that the greatest help is concentrated on those in the greatest need.

I just wanted to make clear that for me the spirit of one-nation Toryism is as strong in the Tory party today as it has ever been. The centre ground is our territory—it is the territory where we have won successive general elections under Lady Thatcher and the Prime Minister. We must never surrender our election-winning strategy. Siren voices from the extreme left, and indeed from the right, may urge us to sidetrack, to move away from one nation policies, but we must remain true to our long-standing beliefs.

That is why I wanted to stress that, certainly in my parliamentary career, I want to devote myself to ensuring that in my area we do not allow high levels of unemployment to undermine our social fabric. We must ensure that in the Wirral, Liverpool and Merseyside we get more jobs, and better ones. We will do that only if we espouse the economic policies that have brought us the success that we are now seeing. It must be part of our objective to ensure that that success is spread to all parts of the United Kingdom. That is the only way in which we can sustain those policies that were the fundamental bedrock of that group of Conservatives in 1950 who produced "One Nation". We must continue to ensure that we capture the electorate's imagination with the new ideas that lie within the one-nation policies of the future. That is why I strongly support the Prime Minister in his belief that we must lay the foundation for sustained, non-inflationary growth in the 21st century too.

We will do that by espousing once again, in clear detail, the five fundamental policies that the Prime Minister has clearly laid out: first, sound economic growth, the foundations of which are made more secure by this Finance Bill; secondly, opportunity and choice in health and education; thirdly, strong law and order policies, enabling everyone to walk our streets without fear; fourthly, first-class public services, building on successful privatisation policies that have brought better quality services, and on the citizens charter, which has given people the rights and the responsibilities that they welcome; finally, pride in our nation.

Pride in our nation means a lot of things—perhaps different things to different people. For me, it means having a nation that is one nation. Of course, the place for our one nation is very much right at the heart of Europe. I hope that all my right hon. and hon. Friends will be more positive about Europe, although recognising, at the same time, that we must continue to fight for British interests. That was very much our Prime Minister's theme in securing, rightly, the opt-out from the social protocol and the postponement of—the opt-out from—a decision on a single currency until we know much more about what that entails, but it also means fighting all along the line to ensure that we have a Europe that is powerful, peaceful and prosperous, built again on the fundamental principles of one-nation Conservatism.

4.51 pm

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): We have listened to an exceptional speech. I fully agree with the right hon. Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt) that the one-nation idea is not the prerogative of one side of the House or the other. It should belong to us all. Some people feel that what has happened in the past—I do not know for how many years—has been an abberation that must be put right. I was one of the three Labour Members who had the privilege of having their name inscribed on a silver platter given to Ian Macleod's widow. Although we had our great differences, we were accorded that sort of respect because we were all trying to do the best for this country's people, and that must be the task.

When my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) talk about the need for this one nation, they are pointing out the differences that have emerged and that need to be put right by the Conservative party, but it is its problem and we will be considering that problem with great interest.

My first comment on the Finance Bill involves the limited number of economic debates that we now have. We have debates on the Queen's Speech, the Budget and the Finance Bill and then a desert through to July. It cannot be right that the central issues involving the running of our country should be the subject of so few economic debates. Under normal circumstances, the next debate will not take place for another six months, which is clearly inadequate.

We now have a regular two-volume issue of the Bill. I remember my horror when I saw the first two-volume issue come out, but the Government are pledged to reduce the burdens on industry and to simplify the taxation system's operation. I know the aims of that, but, despite their assurance, I am not convinced. As the simplification is likely to lead to more complicated transitional arrangements, I suspect that it will not be too long before we have a three-volume edition of the Finance Bill.

The simplification was mentioned in *Accountancy Age* by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith). He was right when he pointed out the need for such simplification, but it will not be an easy task to achieve, as he probably recognises. In my many years in the House, I

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have heard similar promises about taxation simplification, but I have seen Finance Bills go from strength to strength, increasing in size as they go along.

Baroness Thatcher's speech gives the opportunity to assess her impact on the economy. I do not want to dwell on the poll tax. Many hon. Members on the Government Benches share in the humiliation of its introduction. It will serve as a text book on how to overcome the dangers of an over-mighty Prime Minister and a cowed House of Commons. What is more lasting than the billions of pounds lost in that venture is the serious decline in local government.

As a consequence of so much local government finance coming from central Government, decisions are not being made in the places where they should be made. I believe in local government and in the initiatives that many people can introduce in their community's interests. I was politically involved in some small way when Manchester city council decided to retain the airport in Manchester. It was a big decision. Large commitments of money were involved over a long period, but the example of the creation of the Manchester ship canal was put forward, and it was felt that the successors of the city councillors who were involved in that should at least to be able to do the same thing.

Against great Government hostility, those successors went ahead and built Manchester airport, which is of enormous value to the region's citizens and to the communications of the whole of the north-west. They could do that then, but not now, which is wrong. There were people with local knowledge, people of standing and of ability, who would have come to the House but decided not to as they felt that their centre of operations was in their local community, which is what made that community great, impressive and powerful. The trouble is that such people are not likely to undertake that sort of work because of the limited opportunities that they have.

On the size of the Finance Bill, the interesting thing is the number of new taxes that we now have from this Government. We have had the air travel tax, amended in this Finance Bill—one of the consequences of simplification is the amendments that will be made in due course: any changes will be the subject of alterations over the years to come—the insurance tax, and now we have the landfill tax, with its 29 clauses and pages and pages of schedules. The boast of Lord Lawson, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, about the number of taxes that he had abolished will not, therefore, be emulated by the present Chancellor of the Exchequer—that is clear now—unless he listens to the Prime Minister, who wishes to abolish capital gains tax and inheritance tax, but that would be a disaster.

The justification for capital taxes such as capital gains tax and inheritance tax was that capital was a sure source of income. It was differentiated from earned income because that was less sure: people could lose their jobs. The value of capital and the income from that capital would remain, and that was the justification, over many years, for the difference between earned and unearned income. Unearned income deriving from capital was more secure and certain; earned income could just be lost rapidly.

In the post-war years, that aspect changed. With full employment, unearned income was scarcely enough to maintain the value of the capital because of inflation levels, which eroded capital, and the value of capital as a source of income declined. However, we had full employment so the value of earned income rose by comparison. But the position has changed again. We now have high unemployment levels, great fears of redundancy and low inflation so the position has reverted to what it historically was: capital produces much greater certainty in relation to income. Unearned income should be treated in the same way as it historically had been until the Government came into office. That is one of the aspects that we need to take into account.

Mr. Tim Smith: Is the right hon. Gentleman telling the House that he favours, therefore, the reintroduction of the investment income surcharge?

Mr. Sheldon: The investment income surcharge was the right sort of reaction. How we deal with the consequences of the changes in the value of capital under the next Government remains to be seen. An important aspect of the matter is that the value of capital has changed; it went one way and now it has gone another.

In terms of inheritance tax, I can see the case for moderate levels of taxation of capital. Those who have created wealth want to pass it on to their successors and I understand that. To a certain extent, I can see the case for those who want to accumulate wealth and to pass it on to their families. I understand people who work hard to accumulate wealth for themselves and I understand people who work hard to accumulate wealth so that they can pass it on to their successors. What I do not see is why we should relieve from taxation those who are the beneficiaries of that wealth, to which they have contributed nothing. A person who makes wealth needs to be treated with some respect because of the wealth created, but the person who receives that wealth as a beneficiary—as an inheritor—should not be regarded in quite the same way. There is a need for such people to pay some taxes. We can argue about whether they should pay more than they have in the past, but we should certainly not remove the existing level of taxation. That is clearly wrong.

Another issue is the cost nowadays of earning a living. We never used to take such costs into account. Apart from a small allowance for tools, which was a trivial amount, the costs of earning a living were always excluded from income tax assessments. Nowadays, the costs of earning a living are great. Transport costs are one example. In my constituency, there are people who travel 30 or 40 miles to Leeds or Bradford; people never did that before. Transport costs are not allowed against tax at all although people cannot get the kind of work that they used to be able to get.

Fifty, 60 or 70 years ago—not all that long ago—people walked down the road to the mill. People wore ordinary working clothes and took a jam butty or whatever for lunch. People do not do any of that now; things have changed. There is great expense in earning a living today and that needs to be taken into account. Earned income is not the same as unearned income. Unearned income does not cost people anything, but earned income does and we shall have to find some way in which to deal with that.

The central feature of Lady Thatcher's period in office was not the changes she made. What was exceptional about the period was the rise in the exploitation of North sea oil. Anything else was a disclaimer. In the past, Governments took unwise courses, but the balance of

payments constraint always limited the extent to which they could proceed with a particular folly. In 1956, we had the folly of Suez, which was brought to an end by balance of payments constraints. We had Maudling's dash for growth in 1963-64, which was brought to an end by a balance of payments crisis. It might have succeeded otherwise and have been one of the great moves of the post-war years. It could not, however, succeed because of the balance of payments problem. We saw the rise in OPEC—Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries—prices which would have been a much smaller problem if we had not had the difficulty of a balance of payments crisis. All those efforts—some of them useful, some of them not—were brought to heel by the constraint of the balance of payments.

In the 1980s, for the very first time since the 1914-18 war—perhaps since the beginning of the century—we had a balance of payments that was no constraint. The question was what we would do with that enormous advantage. With one bound, we were free. What did we do with that freedom? We destroyed much of our manufacturing industry. There were $2.40 to the pound and there was a 17 per cent. interest rate.

Like many hon. Members, my firmly held views are reinforced by my constituency experiences; they are burnt deeply into me. From 1979 to 1981, my constituency lost one third of its industry. Good firms which had every justification to succeed were lost. If they had been in Germany or Japan, they would have continued. Few of them were low-tech; most were medium-tech and one or two were high-tech. They could not survive in that period. Engineering was a prominent industry in my area, but good firms went.

I am pleased that our amendment refers first to the need for manufacturing industry and that my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East referred to that first in his valuable speech, which I much enjoyed. I might have been prepared to tolerate a massive Finance Bill if it had included much in the way of comfort for manufacturing industry, but I see nothing of real merit. I have argued for manufacturing industry since I came into the House and the situation is now becoming even more urgent.

The pound is now down from DM2.95 to DM2.22. We ran a £1.7 billion trade deficit in October, the latest month for which we have figures. Even the Red Book forecasts a £5 billion deficit in our balance of payments. There are no signs in our overseas account of the consequences of a devaluation of more than 20 per cent., with no erosion by wage inflation, and of unemployment at well over 2 million.

After the years of reckless destruction of our manufacturing industry, we are now seeing the consequences plainly. In such circumstances, one might have expected a contrite Government to do their utmost to repair the disasters of the past. The opportunities are there in this enormous Finance Bill, but they have not been taken.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): The right hon. Gentleman said that the destruction of the manufacturing industry in this country was at least partly caused by an exchange rate that was too high. In the past few minutes, he seems to have said exactly the reverse. He complains about the destruction of manufacturing industry, yet he criticises the fact that the pound has gone down against the deutschmark—from DM2.90 to DM2.20.

Mr. Sheldon: My point is that under normal circumstances, such a devaluation would have produced an enormous export revival. That is what used to happen and we should have seen it happen again. We did not because manufacturing industry was so damaged by the events of the past that it was not able to make use of that advantage. The devaluation and the limit on the size of wage settlements were enormous advantages, but we could not make use of them because of what had happened to manufacturing industry in the years before. We have a high level of skills in my constituency; people earned well above the average for the north-west as a whole and above the average of the country as a whole. Yet those people could not find jobs.

We have a Finance Bill in two thick volumes, yet it contains nothing to deal with the central economic problem of our time, which is how we help manufacturing industry to deal with our failure to pay our way in international markets. The first step should have been to increase substantially the level of capital allowances for plant and machinery. The second should have been to continue to defy the Bank of England on interest rates. Here I pay tribute to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Few Chancellors would have been prepared to defy the Bank in the face of market pressure and I look forward to seeing him continue that defiance in the coming months.

Thirdly, the Chancellor could have provided funds for our manufacturers. I know that the best sources for investment are within the companies themselves; no one needs to tell me that. However, if one considers the danger of our overseas position, the case for supplementing such investment sources is overwhelming. The Government cannot operate a hands-off approach at a time of such urgency. Those investment sources should be supplemented—work on that should have been started long ago—whether by encouraging retentions for investment or by more favourable grants. Those are tasks that the Government should have undertaken.

The economic future of our country lies in the hands of our manufacturers. It is a terrible indictment of this Government that such an obvious case needs to be made at all.

5.9 pm

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I tried to follow the points made by the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon). His speech seemed a little like a history lesson in which we rehearsed answers that would have been correct for last year's examination paper on economics—especially his reference to the destruction of manufacturing being caused by the high exchange rate of the very early 1980s. He seemed to overlook the unbelievable damage done to manufacturing industry by the antediluvian industrial relations practices encouraged, approved, welcomed and supported by the Labour Government of the 1970s.

The right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne seemed to ignore entirely the effects of the penal rates of taxation—which drove many of the best managers and researchers to offer their skills in competing economies—and the rates of interest and inflation, which discouraged

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risk taking and investment in this country. Those were the causes of the decline of manufacturing at the beginning of the 1980s.

It is to the Government's credit that the situation has been totally transformed, to the point where we export more per head than Japan, where we are shortly to become a net exporter of motor cars, and we export more televisions and other goods than any other European country. That is as a result of the transformation in industrial relations and the fact that we have a grip on inflation, fair rates of taxation, and so on.

I agreed with the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne on one point: his approval of the speech made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt), who gave an excellent, clear and timely reminder of the true nature of one-nation Conservatism. He spoke eloquently, warmly and in a well-informed way about the origins of one-nation Conservatism, which quite wrongly is now characterised as some excessively pro-European, left-wing body of philosophy. It has nothing whatever to do with that, as my right hon. Friend pointed out, which I very much welcomed.

Last week, Baroness Thatcher delivered an important speech in the City of London. The central theme of the speech was a vigorous attack on the principles and policies close to the heart of the Labour party. It encompassed a specific attack on new Labour. It issued a clear warning about the dangers to the country of those people who flirt with the idea that a brief period of opposition for the Conservative party would be either good for Britain or good for the party. She made it clear that that was not true. I welcomed all that. Indeed, we have heard today evidence of how right she was.

Surprisingly, the most reported part of Baroness Thatcher's speech was the allegation that the Conservative party had undergone a lurch to the right. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth, as the Finance Bill demonstrates. The Bill is based on a one-nation Budget. Baroness Thatcher was right not only in that respect but in her attack on the Labour party. The speech of the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) was the single most incompetent and ignorant speech that I have heard a Treasury spokesman make in the 12 years that I have been in the House.

The hon. Member for Oxford, East absolutely refused to answer any of the fundamental questions that would face any incoming Labour Government. He could not or would not say whether the present level of public spending was too high, too low or right. He could not or would not say whether the present inflation target was too high, too low or about right. He could not or would not say whether the present level of interest rates was too high, too low or about right. As he could not answer those most basic questions, it was only to his good fortune that neither the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) nor the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) was present to hear him make such an unbelievable mess of his opportunity.

The Budget has introduced measures through the Finance Bill which put the interests of the lower-paid at the top of the agenda. The extension of the low-rate, 20 per cent. tax band, a cut in the basic rate and a rise in personal allowances are all designed to give maximum help to people on lower incomes. Indeed, the Budget was so responsible, so centrist in its approach, so one nation in its foundations that most pundits were astonished by its moderation.

Many commentators who had been looking forward to a great display of fireworks and huge tax cuts were positively frustrated at the responsibility displayed by the Chancellor in his Budget measures. There was a degree of sourness in some of the immediate reactions because such people had not got what they had expected to be able to attack: large-scale tax cuts.

Some of those howls of protest were somewhat silenced a week or two later by the cut in interest rates. Few people—even if they do not know at what level they want interest rates—are able to criticise lower interest rates. The fact that, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, West pointed out, mortgage rates are at the lowest level for 30 years is an achievement that everyone in the country can celebrate.

The only people who do not benefit from low interest rates are savers. There are, of course, many small savers, especially pensioners, for whom the interest derived from their modest savings is an important supplement to their pension. It is for that reason that I particularly welcome clause 65, which introduces the lower rate of taxation on investment income for basic rate taxpayers.

I was very interested to hear the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne say that he favoured the reintroduction of the investment income surcharge. I looked carefully for any response from the Opposition Front-Bench team to that. I did not detect any, but perhaps later in the debate Labour Front Benchers will make it clear whether they agree with that proposed reintroduction.

I take precisely the opposite view. I believe that people who have accumulated modest savings, which have usually been paid for out of income that has already been taxed, deserve a lower rate of tax on their investment income. Clause 65 at least begins to remove the element of double taxation on investment income. I hope in due course that it will be possible for my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor to extend that measure by setting an even lower rate for basic rate taxpayers who enjoy a certain amount of investment income.

I have been asked by pensioners in my constituency whether that concession is likely to be maintained. Their point makes any Opposition Front-Bench comment on the suggestion of the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne about the investment income surcharge particularly interesting.

The landfill tax is one of the important new proposals in the Bill.

Mr. Sheldon: I should intervene before the hon. Gentleman leaves that point. I did not favour the investment income surcharge. I merely drew the distinction between earned and unearned income, which needs to be maintained. The main point of my argument is that there is a cost of earning a living. There is very little cost involved in getting a living from one's investments. The point that I was making was that those two sorts of income need to be treated separately—whether that is by means of allowances or by some other way has yet to be decided.

Mr. Yeo: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for making that point. That was not what I understood him to

say in answer to the intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith). When we study *Hansard*, we shall perhaps be able to determine whether his clarification is in fact a slight withdrawal from what appeared to be his earlier position.

I welcome the landfill tax as the introduction of a market instrument which will influence the behaviour of industry in an environmentally positive way. I recall from my time at the Department of the Environment how difficult it was to find ways of putting into practice the excellent theory that the tax system can be used to influence behaviour in such a way. Indeed, apart from the lower rate of duty on unleaded petrol, it is difficult to think of a good example of any differential tax or any other kind of market instrument that has been environmentally effective.

The introduction of the landfill tax is to be welcomed for another reason: the proceeds are to be recycled directly for the benefit of industry in the form of the cut in employers' national insurance contributions. That is a way of using a tax, which will produce greener results, as a job-creating measure as well. It will be very widely supported.

I hope that the Labour party will assure us at some stage that, in the improbable event of its coming to power, it would not use the landfill tax simply as a means of raising revenue and that the proceeds would continue to be recycled directly and in their entirety for the purpose of job creation.

Although I support the Government's aim of eliminating inheritance tax and capital gains tax, I hope that greater priority can be given to reducing the rate of taxation on long-term capital gains. Indeed, if the rate of capital gains tax on investments that have been held for a minimum of, say, five years were cut from 40 to 20 per cent—or, preferably, even lower—the consequence would be increased revenue. A great many investors are locked into large, long-term capital gains that they are unwilling to realise at a tax rate of 40 per cent. A lower rate would not only encourage them to realise those gains but be economically beneficial, because the distortions in the economy and in investment decisions would be removed.

If my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary wanted to be really Machiavellian, he could introduce a rate cut that was effective for one year only—for example, for the financial year 1996-97 the rate could be reduced from 40 to 10 per cent. I expect that investors will rush to take advantage of any such cut.

Finally, I want to examine the question of stakeholding, about which we have heard so much recently. It was helpful yesterday to have some clarification from the right hon. Member for Sedgefield showing that the term "stakeholder economy" is not a policy or a philosophy but simply a slogan.

Mr. Tim Smith: A soundbite.

Mr. Yeo: "Slogan" is new Labour-speak for "soundbite".

After all the efforts of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield over the past 18 months, I do not know how anyone could think that he was capable of producing something as coherent as a policy or a philosophy. Now that we know that it is just a slogan, perhaps we should explore how it relates to the Finance Bill. This debate is an opportunity to shed some light on that. I do not seek clarification solely for the benefit of Conservative Members; Labour Members are keener than we are to know what is behind the slogan. I think in particular of the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone), who understandably may be alarmed by the way in which policy announcements—slogans—pour down from on high when the right hon. Member for Sedgefield is on his way back from a winter holiday.

It is clear that, for the Conservative party, a stakeholder economy stands, above all, for three things: for giving tenants the chance to become home owners; for giving employees, in particular the employees of former nationalised industries, the opportunity to become shareholders; and for giving trade union members the right to be balloted before they are forced to strike and to re-elect their leaders regularly. We know that, for the Labour party, a stakeholder economy means none of those things, because the current party leadership voted against those proposals when they first came before the House.

The Bill deals with a wide range of economic and fiscal matters. I hope that the hon. Member for Oxford, East will tell us which of the 191 clauses and 37 schedules will help to create a stakeholder economy. If that is too difficult a question for him, perhaps he could tell us which of those 191 clauses and 37 schedules is at least compatible with Labour's new slogan. If he cannot answer those questions, we can conclude only that the stakeholder economy is not about individuals paying less tax, not about small businesses paying less tax, not about using the tax system for environmental purposes and not about allowing pensioners to keep a little more of the income from their savings—their stake in the economy.

If the stakeholder economy is not about any of those, we are forced to conclude that it is just another soundbite—a way of filling time between now and the next election when the waffle, which is new Labour's substitute for real policy, will be put to the test. It is a way of avoiding answering the questions that the hon. Member for Oxford, East so assiduously avoided answering in his lengthy opening speech.

If the stakeholder economy is none of the things that have mentioned, if it is not just empty waffle and a meaningless slogan, presumably the stakeholder economy is, for new Labour, what we all suspect and fear: a bigger stake for trade union leaders at the expense of employers and rank-and-file employees; a bigger stake for the European Commission at the expense of British interests; and a bigger stake for Labour local councils at the expense, usually, of council tax payers. If that is the case, I hope that the hon. Member for Oxford, East will be honest enough to say so. If he says nothing, we can conclude only that it is truly the case.

I warmly support the Bill. I do not intend to say any more about the detail of policy in case the eye of the Committee of Selection falls on me when it is choosing hon. Members to serve on the Standing Committee. I commend the Bill to the House.

5.25 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): It was interesting to watch the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) follow the lead of the right hon. Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt) in his robust defence of one-nation conservatism. The contents of the Bill seem to have

[Mr. Malcolm Bruce]

provoked a sudden debate about that, which I assume has nothing to do with anything that has happened outside the House.

There is a fundamental difference between the aspirations of Conservative Members, but there appears to be an agreement that the Bill meets all aspirations, from whatever wing of the party. One possible reason for that is that the Chancellor's room for manoeuvre was very limited, and he was forced to compromise, thereby pleasing none or pleasing all.

I want to focus on the report of the Treasury Select Committee—of which I am a member—which was published today. It makes a number of pertinent comments on the Bill and on the detail that we will have an opportunity to consider both today and in Committee. The three aspects of the Budget to which I want to draw attention are, first, the current level of public borrowing; secondly, the details of the education settlement and public expenditure control of it; and, thirdly, the private finance initiative and the investment spending attached to that.

The Select Committee has expressed concern about the level of public borrowing. Indeed, in advance of the Budget, I pointed out that the Chancellor's room for manoeuvre was very narrow because of his failure to bring public borrowing under control. At that time, I did not realise how badly out of control it was. The reality is that we have ended up with a rather half-baked Budget—modest in tax cuts, with notional spending cuts and rises in petrol and council taxes.

A number of Conservative Members challenged the Labour party spokesman, the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), on the appropriate level of spending and taxation. However, the Chancellor is still predicting that the tax burden will continue to rise every year right through to 2000-01. I suspect that, by that time, the Conservative party will not be in charge of the management of the economy.

The Chancellor is to be commended for resisting the siren calls from one wing of his party to go for broke. He recognised that, whatever the aspirations of his party, he had a responsibility to the national finances which required him to put them before recovering lost ground or buying back lost supporters.

That description may not be to the taste of Conservative Members, so I draw their attention to the Chancellor's comments on "The Frost Programme" in September 1994, before the borrowing figures for that year were published. The right hon. and learned Gentleman was asked whether taxes could be cut if borrowing fell to £30 billion. He said:

"Well, big deal down to £30 billion. £30 billion is not the basis for cutting taxes, and would actually worry all those people out there if they thought I was going to start tax cutting on the back of even a £30 billion public sector requirement."

That could not have been clearer.

One year on, however, the Chancellor is forecasting a borrowing requirement of £29 billion, and all the comments made in the past few days suggest that it is proving hard to achieve even that figure. There is a real possibility that the Chancellor will cut taxes when the borrowing requirement is higher than £30 billion, contrary to his indication that it would be irresponsible to do so. I accept the advice of the Chancellor—the tax cut is not justified, and should not have been proposed. The cut has not been supported by Liberal Democrats, or by at least some Labour Members.

Mr. Barry Legg (Milton Keynes, South-West): The hon. Gentleman may be in danger of misleading the House to some extent about the Treasury and Civil Service Committee's position on the matter. The Committee's report—from which the hon. Gentleman did not dissent—stated that the Committee was "broadly in favour" of the overall stance of the Budget.

Mr. Bruce: I recognise that the Chancellor accepted his responsibility, and sought not deep tax cuts but to ensure that the Budget's overall impact was close to neutral. Nevertheless, he stated that a borrowing requirement of £30 billion would not justify tax cuts. The present position is different from that of a couple of weeks ago, when the Committee produced its report, and it appears that a borrowing deficit of £30 billion may be the outcome this year. That wholly justifies my opinion that the Chancellor may not have been cautious enough.

The hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg) will have to contain himself as I deal with the education settlement, and I shall make clear exactly what the report says. Liberal Democrat and Labour Members have rightly pointed out that the Government's claim to be providing extra funding for education is simply a deception—it simply is not true. The Committee's report makes it clear that we did not accept the Government's view, and that Opposition Members who made that point were correct. Ministers cannot go on claiming credit for any generosity in education funding, as it does not exist.

The Select Committee report states:

"The increase in spending does not . . . have quite the substance the Chancellor claimed for it . . . There seems little doubt that some local authorities will be unable to pass on any increase in spending, and that some schools may neither perceive nor receive any increase in resources."

That could not be clearer. Education is not receiving the financial support it needs, which in itself justifies the Committee's contention that, if there was any room for manoeuvre in the Budget, the money should have been made available for education and not for tax cuts.

The Select Committee also expressed concern about the working of the Government's private finance initiative, and we are about to produce a report on that subject. This year's Red Book makes it clear that, far from unlocking new private finance to allow higher public investment, the private finance initiative is being used simply as a substitute for previously committed Government spending. That is not an attack on the principle of the private finance initiative, and the Select Committee may be able to inform the House on the matter in a few weeks' or months' time, after we have taken evidence. We can then show whether our scepticism about the real benefits of the initiative is justified.

It is clear from the Government's presentation that the private finance initiative is not unlocking any additional public investment, but is simply being used to help the Government to bring their borrowing under control. In spite of that, the Government have not been successful.

I should like to refer to a number of specific measures that certainly will be raised in Committee. I have made it clear that the 1p reduction in income tax is not justified, and that I shall vote against it. I also wish to pick up on

the Chief Secretary's ebullient claim about the impact of the reduction in spirits duty of 27p per bottle—the biggest reduction in sprits duty since the war, he said. That is true, but the Chief Secretary failed to tell the House that the Government increased the duty last year by 26p a bottle.

Following the Government's defeat in the VAT vote in the House, the Chancellor—in a fit of pique—forgot his fine words about supporting the industry, and sought to claw back revenue. In doing so, however, the Government lost revenue. They depressed the domestic demand for spirits, to such an extent that less revenue was received following the increase in duty than was received in the previous year when the duty was lower. I hope that the industry will recover and that revenue will return to last year's level, not because I want the Chancellor to secure revenue but because I want to see an increase in the sales of home-consumed whisky, to the benefit of the industry.

I should like to see a consistent strategy from the Government which recognises that the tax regime disadvantages the home-produced spirits industry. Taxation should be based on alcohol content, not on some specious view that spirits are somehow more harmful than wine. I have often said in the House that I find it extraordinary that we choose to tax home-produced spirits—consistently our largest export commodity— to the advantage of imported wines. That is a crazy approach, which I cannot believe any other country would pursue.

An item of which I was unaware has been raised with me by constituents, and seems to be the result of a strange anomaly. The 17.5 per cent. VAT rate, rather than 8 per cent., is applied to orders of 2,300 litres of central heating fuel, on the grounds that such an order is deemed to be for commercial use. That seems unfair, and I am aware of people who have such a large requirement and are being charged 17.5 per cent. The Government should consider raising the threshold, or take account of council tax banding as proof that a consumer's requirement is domestic. The anomaly seems to be affecting and angering a number of people.

The Government should reconsider their very unfair cut in energy efficiency grants, which has caused a great deal of anger and frustration among those involved in the provision of home insulation. The two major bodies concerned are Neighbourhood Energy Action and Energy Action (Scotland). The Government must acknowledge that they are seen as having deceived the public and the agencies, and to have gone back on clear promises to this House.

After the Government defeat on the motion to increase VAT on fuel to 17.5 per cent., and on a number of occasions since, Ministers gave assurances that the budget for home insulation would continue to be £100 million a year. They have now cut the budget to £69 million a year, despite the fact that, on 23 January last year, the Paymaster General, the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), said that the £100 million a year budget would continue during the next three years.

On 22 May last year, the Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency, the hon. Member for West Hertfordshire (Mr. Jones), said that, during 1995-96, some £100 million would be made available for grants, and that a similar sum would be set aside for the next two years. That promise was clear and unequivocal, and agencies have operated on that basis. As a result of the complete betrayal of that assurance and the reversal of that policy, many people—particularly elderly people—who need home insulation will not be able to get it.

It is no good the Government saying that they will make a 25 per cent. grant for people who fall outside the qualification threshold. All the evidence suggests that, unless the grant is about 70 to 75 per cent., the take-up level among those who are just outside the threshold will be very low. The Government know that to be the case, and they have calculated on that basis. I urge the Government yet again to reconsider what they have done, because their policy is neither justified nor fair.

The hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) talked about the landfill tax, and the benefit of using that revenue to reduce charges on employers. He surely accepts that that was not the policy which applied when VAT was imposed on fuel, but it was one small, offsetting gesture that the Government took on board: they would use some of the revenue to provide home insulation grants for those most in need of them. In those circumstances, it is regrettable that the Government have gone back on that policy.

Mr. Yeo: Is it not the case that, even following the reduction in the projected figures for spending on the home energy efficiency scheme, the spending in the next financial year will still be substantially higher than it was before VAT was introduced on domestic fuel charges?

Mr. Bruce: Of course that is true. The point is that a promise was made, on which agencies based their plans. The agencies now expect that the reversal in policy will reduce the number of people who will receive the benefit of home energy insulation by 200,000, which is one third. That is the point at issue, as well as the fact that it was a link which the Government accepted and have now broken.

A number of developments have hit charities particularly hard, and unfortunately, to date, the Government have not responded to them. The national lottery has clearly hit charities extremely hard, but so has the switch from income tax to VAT. Charities estimate that they will have an extra £350 million of costs as a result of that policy. As a consequence, the reduction in the standard rate of income tax means that more revenue will be lost to charities, because, of course, people who benefit from covenants will get back one penny in the pound less in tax relief than would have been the case. It is estimated that that change in policy will cost charities some £17 million a year.

I hope that the Government will consider, for example, allowing covenants which were signed before the Budget to continue to qualify for a 25 per cent. relief, on the basis that donors could not have taken into account when making their donations the fact that the relief would be less than anticipated. I see the Financial Secretary nodding. I hope that his nod is a sign that the Government will either accept or propose such an amendment.

Mr. Jack: Listen hard.

Mr. Bruce: I am grateful to the Financial Secretary, and I will be here to listen on that basis.

There are other issues that I think would probably be better raised in Committee; and I and my colleague on the Committee intend to raise them.

[Mr. Bruce]

The Bill is extremely long, which is a depressing comment on the complexity of our tax system and our apparent inability to simplify it. My view, and the view of my colleagues, continues to be that, within his broad responsibility, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has acted responsibly, which is possibly why he won no praise from Lady Thatcher—or possibly because he is a one-nation Tory; I am not sure which it was. Nevertheless, I believe, for the reasons I have stated, that the overall thrust of the Budget, and the Finance Bill which flows from it, is flawed and not one which I or my colleagues have supported or will support.

As a point of clarification, I do not regard the Opposition amendment as satisfactory either, because, as one Conservative Member has said, a windfall tax is no basis for financing an alternative strategy. I and my colleagues are fundamentally opposed to that, and we cannot support such a strategy or the Labour motion. We will, if necessary, force a Division on the Second Reading of the Bill.

5.44 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): I remind the House of my interests, as declared in the Register of Members' Interests—not that my remarks will be in any way remotely connected to any of them.

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce). He is a colleague on the Treasury Select Committee, and will not be surprised to know that I frequently disagree with him. Nevertheless, I shall say two things for the hon. Gentleman and the Liberal Democrats this afternoon. First of all, they do at least have the honesty and the courage, when proposing a specific increase in public expenditure, to propose at the same time the increase in taxation that will pay for it. Secondly, they do at least occasionally appear to have some policies.

The hon. Member for Gordon set out a list of thoughts this afternoon, and he has obviously given some consideration to all of them. Some of the proposals, no doubt, have greater merit than others, and I hope that he will forgive me for not engaging with them all now. At least there were some policy ideas there. What an extraordinary and breathtaking contrast his speech was to that of the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), who spoke on behalf of the Labour party this afternoon. That was an amazingly vacuous, shambolic speech.

I agree with the comments of some of my hon. Friends that the vacuity of the speech of the hon. Member for Oxford, East was unprecedented, even coming from the Labour party. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will recall that he was specifically asked by Conservative Members for his views on interest rates—whether they were currently too high or too low or whether they were right. He was asked what his views were on an inflation target; whether there should be one and, if so, what it should be. He was asked for his views on a range of fundamental elements in any economic policy in any country, and it was quite obvious from the hon. Gentleman's refusal—

Mr. Bayley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: I will give way in a moment, if the hon. Gentleman will let me finish.

It was obvious from the determination of the hon. Member for Oxford, East to evade all those questions that the Labour party does not have the rudiments of an answer to any of them. It is quite clear that the hon. Gentleman and the party that he was speaking for this afternoon have not even begun to put together the very rudiments of any economic policy for the country. Yet the Labour party has the extraordinary pretention to claim to the British electorate that it is a credible alternative Government.

The speech by the hon. Member for Oxford, East was an amazing performance. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope that you will not think that I am making a personal attack on the hon. Gentleman. He is not an unintelligent man. I know him well. He is no less intelligent than other hon. Members who sit on the Labour Back Benches and Front Benches. The fact of the matter is that he was in an impossible position.

Even if the Gentleman had wanted to or been capable of it, how could he have devised an economic policy when his boss was incapable of devising or expounding one? The abdication and the vacuity in the Labour party come from on high—from the very top of the Labour party. That will obviously paralyse every statement by junior members of the Front-Bench team.

Mr. Bayley: The hon. Gentleman discussed inflation with my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith). Has he read the briefing in the Library, which shows that Britain has the second highest rate of inflation of the G7 countries, and that it is slightly more than 1 per cent. greater than the top end of the target in the Treasury forecast? Does he believe that inflation is too high, too low or about right in comparison with the Government's target?

Mr. Davies: Inflation, which has reduced enormously since we joined the exchange rate mechanism in 1990—which fact is, of course, satisfactory, encouraging and gratifying—remains too high; we wish it to be even lower. However, I believe that the balance of professional opinion in the academic world, the City and elsewhere is that the Government have more than a sporting chance of achieving their target of reducing recorded inflation, as shown in the retail prices index, to less than 2.5 per cent. during the present Parliament.

I have to say to the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) that, when that is achieved—and it will be achieved—it will be regarded as one of the great historic achievements of the present Parliament, because the Government will have reduced inflation, and with it inflationary expectations, to a level that neither the hon. Gentleman nor I have known in our adult lifetime. That is a major achievement. It represents the moment when the country has finally climbed out of the hole that was dug for us by the Labour party's policies in the 1960s and 1970s.

Let me turn, as I am sure you are anxious I should, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the specifics of the Budget. The Budget is first rate. I do not say that as a cliché; I say it in a thoroughly considered sense.

The Budget is built on, and enshrines, the two great principles of the Conservative party, which I am proud to represent. First, it represents the belief in sound money, in responsible, competent management, because every penny of the tax reductions that have been offered to the British public in the Budget have been met pound for pound and penny for penny by public expenditure reductions, and one cannot get much sounder than that.

The second great principle on which the Conservative party is based, and about which I am proud to speak on its behalf this afternoon, is the principle of one nation. It is the principle that, when dividends are to be paid—dividends from economic growth or from sound financial and fiscal management—they should not be directed at one section of our people, but the whole nation should benefit. That is the principle that is enshrined in the Finance Bill.

There is something in the Budget for the great mass of the working population who pay tax at the standard rate—a reduction of 1p. No doubt there will be more reductions as long as the Conservative Government remain in office, which I hope will be a very long time.

There is something significant in the Budget for those people who are just entering the labour market, or who are still on relatively low salaries or wages, in the considerable increase in the 20 per cent. band. There is something for families in the increase of the married man's allowance. There is something for those people who, perhaps as a result of thrift and hard work, have something to hand on to their children—the inheritance tax threshold has been increased to £200,000.

There is something in the Budget for unemployed people, those who hope to get back into work, and in the reduction in employers' national insurance contributions. I could continue.

In the most genuine sense, and most strikingly, the Budget is to the highest degree a one-nation Budget, and I am proud to support it as such.

I did not intend, when I entered the Chamber, to mention the name of the previous Prime Minister, but her name has been mentioned several times, and it might be artificial to pretend that that has not happened.

One of the extraordinary things about Baroness Thatcher's criticisms of the Government a few days ago was her suggestion that the Government had not cut public expenditure sufficiently. The position is very sad. I fear that Baroness Thatcher, who takes second place to no one in my admiration for her historic achievements, that great personage of our history, in her decline has forgotten one of the great rules that she held dear in her prime—that one should do one's homework before making a pronouncement.

Had Baroness Thatcher done her homework, she would have discovered that the Chancellor has cut no less than £44 billion from the public expenditure expectations that he inherited, including a reduction of £11 billion in the Budget this year.

Had she done her homework, she would have known that, in the 1995-96 financial year, public expenditure as a proportion of gross domestic product is about 42.5 per cent. I am afraid that the Government of Baroness Thatcher, which I was proud to support, never succeeded in reducing that ratio to 42.5 per cent. between 1979 and 1987. She achieved it only in the irresponsible, uncontrolled and regrettable boom that existed at the end of the 1980s, the price of which all hon. Members in the Chamber know about.

I must remind Baroness Thatcher of the figures; I must remind her of reality. The average of public expenditure as a proportion of domestic product throughout her time of office, from 1979 to 1990, was about 44 per cent., considerably greater than the present proportion—and that is decreasing. So much for Baroness Thatcher.

There is an extraordinary state of affairs. The economy is almost unprecedentedly sound. Last year, we had growth of about 2.5 per cent. We hope for about 3 per cent. this year. Inflation is down to levels that most hon. Members in the Chamber cannot remember. Unemployment has decreased, month after month, for two or three years.

The present state of the economy is extraordinary. Even more so is the fact that that process has continued for rather a long time. After all, growth in output revived, the recession came to an end, in the spring of 1992—about six months, incidentally, before we left the ERM, in case there are any illusions on that score.

We have never had—at least not in my lifetime or since the second world war—almost five years of continuous growth without running into the balance of payments constraints and the inflationary constraints of which we were reminded by the distinguished right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), who was Chief Secretary in the Wilson Government and who has every reason to remember the constraints that operated on the British economy in the bad old days.

That is an extraordinary state of affairs, which demands an explanation. I believe that it is consistent only with the notion that there has been a genuine supply side revolution in the British economy, and that that genuine supply side revolution in the British economy has taken place under a Conservative Government.

The media, and many people in the country who comment on political affairs, do not even consider that revolution. They are obsessed by what one might call the superficialities, or the flotsam and jetsam, of politics. But what counts, and what will be remembered in historical retrospect, is the underlying reality, which is that the tide is strong. It is bearing forward the British economy; it is bearing forward our nation, and it will bear our party forward to victory at the next general election.

5.59 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): It is tempting to follow the hon. Gentlemen who have sought to analyse those fashionable slogans of "one nation" and "stakeholder economy", but I shall not do so. There seems to be a great danger. In the modern, competitive market economy—I believe that that is a phrase now used for capitalism—with globalisation, the fashionable inflation targets and control by central bankers, it may not be possible to have such an economy and, as well, have either one-nation Toryism or a stakeholder economy if what we mean by "stakeholder economy" is the sort of social cohesion in which western European countries believe. I do not know and I am delving into deep water. I see that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are looking at me and perhaps I should return to the Bill's Second Reading.

I will not talk about the economy or tax changes, but about a subject that is, perhaps, marginal in this period of pre-election fever: the length and complexity of the Bill and of previous legislation introduced by successive Conservative Governments since 1979. Many hon. Members have commented on the fact that the Bill is 408 pages long. I believe that it is the longest Finance Bill in history, although there might have been a longer one. It is made up of two volumes because, apart from the complexity of its drafting, it cannot be physically handled in one volume.

[Mr. Denzil Davies]

The figures compiled by the Inland Revenue in a report show that since 1979 the average length of Finance Bills introduced by successive Conservative Governments has been almost 200 pages—193 pages. In the period from 1974 to 1979—the period of old Labour and those terrible socialists, Lords Wilson and Callaghan—the figure was 103. In the years since 1979, under Conservative Governments, Finance Bills have doubled in length and complexity. Those Governments were elected on a promise to roll back the frontiers of the state—or socialism, I am not sure. If the promise was to roll back socialism, they have kept it; if the promise was to roll back the state, they have not. Conservative Governments have used the state in an almost Leninist way to roll back the frontiers of socialism—perhaps that is the justification.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) and I remember the pompous speeches of Opposition spokesmen before 1979. They said that taxation and Finance Bills were about raising money and nothing else—certainly not some terrible thing such as social or fiscal engineering. What we have seen—and it is borne out in the Inland Revenue's report if one reads between the lines—is a massive attempt at fiscal and social engineering using Finance Bills.

Those of us who occasionally read professional publications on accountancy and taxation know that, over a number of years—not just this year or last year—hardly a month has gone by without those publications including condemnations of and concerns and complaints about the length, complexity and obscurity of tax legislation under successive Conservative Governments. It became so bad that the Inland Revenue was asked to commission a report, on which it did a good job, called "The Path to Tax Simplification". It recommended that over the next five years most of the legislation introduced by the Inland Revenue over the past nine or 10 years should be redrafted. The Government accepted the recommendation, so we now have the prospect of the 408 pages of the Finance Bill being redrafted over the next five years.

The poor Inland Revenue—I feel sorry for it—says that the legislation is to be redrafted in

"simpler, more user-friendly language, which will be easier for everyone to understand".

I am not sure who "everyone" is supposed to be. Lawyers have a romantic image of the man on the Clapham omnibus. I do not know whether he or she is to be "everyone", but an idyllic picture is painted of the man or woman on the Clapham omnibus reading on his or her way to work the redrafted, easy-to-read Finance Bill that the Government now promise.

There has also been a reprehensible tendency to blame the poor old draftsman. I heard the Chief Secretary in his speech—or perhaps it was my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) in his speech—say in an offhand remark that parts of the Finance Bill had been drafted by the private sector. That is fine, but the implication is that the parliamentary draftsman has not been up to his job. It is unfair to blame the parliamentary draftsman for what has happened. It is equally unfair to blame the Inland Revenue or Customs and Excise. Responsibility for the Finance Bill lies with Treasury Ministers.

Things may have changed since my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne and I were in the Treasury, but I doubt it. I remember that a list used to appear around Budget time that was prepared by Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue. The list was usually very long and it became longer every year. But Ministers can prune the list and cut proposals from it; they do not have to accept even half of it. The only conclusion that I can draw is that, year after year, including this year, Tory Ministers have had neither the courage nor the will to prune that list. It is important to do so and it is unfair for Ministers to ask parliamentary draftsmen to draft 408 pages in the period between the Budget being prepared and publication of the Finance Bill for Second Reading.

Mr. Tim Smith: It is easy to criticise Treasury Ministers, but has the right hon. Gentleman noticed that the Bill implements in law a large number of extra-statutory concessions for which the Public Accounts Committee is always calling to be implemented in Finance Acts? Is not that a welcome addition to the Bill? Are there not a number of measures in the Bill for which the private sector has been asking?

Mr. Davies: I accept that, but if the hon. Gentleman reads the Inland Revenue report he will see that it makes it clear that at least half the contents of the Bills over the past 10 or 15 years have constituted social engineering by the Government.

I have a confession to make: a long time ago I was the Minister responsible for probably the most complex and complicated tax legislation introduced in the House. I should not think that anyone much remembers it, thank goodness—it was legislation on developing land tax. [HON. MEMBERS: "We do remember it."] I am sending shudders through Conservative Members. The legislation was impeccably drafted, clear and concise. It was the distillation of United Kingdom tax law, 900 years of English land law and some Scottish land law—with its feus and sasines—thrown in. Ministers were responsible for that legislation. It was a ministerial decision and, at least in that case, the draftsman was given enough time to draft that complex legislation.

That brings me to parliamentary time. Throughout the 1980s the time allowed for Standing Committees to discuss and scrutinise Finance Bills has been under threat from a succession of Conservative Governments. There have been more threats of timetables and guillotines and actual timetables and guillotines. It used to be unheard of for a Finance Bill to be guillotined in Committee. The Conservatives have produced longer Bills and used their power—I believe that it was an abuse of power—to reduce the opportunity to scrutinise the Bills.

Conservative Governments had such comfortable majorities that they did not bother worrying about those conventions of the constitution. There are conventions in the British constitution and those conventions are much more important when the constitution is unwritten and we have a first-past-the-post electoral system, with which I agree. However, time and again, Governments with comfortable majorities have been arrogant and have ridden rough-shod over the conventions and the result has been poorer, more complex and more obscure fiscal and other legislation.

In addition, there has been pressure from all sides of the House, even from the Opposition—I find that amazing—to turn working in the House into a nine-to-five

job, four days a week. If that happens, the House of Commons will be unable to scrutinise Bills such as we are debating tonight. All those pressures have contributed to the complexity of legislation and the difficulties in analysing and interpreting it.

As a consequence, the courts have gradually moved away from a literal interpretation of legislation. There have been other reasons for that, and I am not seeking to suggest that the complexity and length of legislation is the only reason, but when the courts are faced with complex legislation, they tend to move away from the literal construction—which is usually in favour of the citizen, be it in taxation or criminal matters—and look for the purpose of the statute.

I hate to mention Pepper *v.* Hart in the presence of my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne, but that case was the high watermark. During inquisitorial proceedings in a case between two parties, the Inland Revenue and the taxpayer, the House of Lords decided to overturn the rule of centuries that the courts did not read *Hansard* in construing legislation. It may be right that *Hansard* should be read, but that was not a matter for a court to decide. It should have been decided after analysis by the Law Commission, which exists to do just that, however, the Law Lords, who have little experience of parliamentary procedure, in an adversarial contest, made a decision that has considerable consequences for professionals and others who now have to read *Hansard* when they give advice. If they do not read *Hansard* and it contains something relevant that they should see, they can be sued for professional negligence so have to read *Hansard* at quite considerable costs. The high watermark has been Pepper *v.* Hart, as the courts move towards examining the purpose of legislation.

The fact that the courts now look at *Hansard* increases the power of the Executive. Perhaps it is already happening, but, especially with the looser simplified drafting about which we have been told, Ministers will be tempted to read out in Committee well-crafted statements, written for them by the Inland Revenue or whoever, from which they will not deviate under questioning. The courts will then read *Hansard* and use those statements to fill in the blanks created either because they cannot understand the complicated drafting or by the alternative simplified drafting. That will increase the power of the Executive. Of course, the reformed interpretation favoured by courts also increases the power of the judiciary.

I may be old-fashioned, but I believe that the best protection for the citizen, especially in fiscal and communal matters, is the close scrutiny of perhaps complex but well-drafted and precise legislation in the House so that the literal interpretation can be applied by the courts and if there is a conflict or a problem, the benefit of the doubt is given to the citizen. I would prefer such a system to the way in which everything is moving. I hope we are wrong and that we can draw it back.

Mr. Jack: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman and I have been following his line of argument closely. Does he agree, however, that it is to be welcomed that, wherever possible, the Inland Revenue consults widely on clauses which ultimately will find their way into Finance Bills? There is a real attempt to enable those who will be affected by certain legislation to have a say at an early stage in the drafting of a proposed parliamentary enactment of such legislation.

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman has not been in the House very long, but history reveals that when some of us were Ministers, we published entire Bills as draft clauses. The development land tax legislation was published as draft clauses as was the banking legislation that I introduced in 1976 or 1977. When the Conservative Government came to power in 1979, however, the policy of publishing draft clauses was stopped and they took a Leninist attitude to pushing through all legislation as quickly as possible. The Minister cannot say now, 16 or 17 years later, that draft clauses are a good thing. Why have not we seen more of them since 1979?

Resimplification will be a major task. It is no good the Minister thinking that he has solved the problem by spending £25 million and asking for everything to be redrafted as that will also cause problems. The main way to deal with the matter is not to introduce Bills that are 408 pages long and expect the House of Commons to scrutinise them.

6.15 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): When I asked the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) whether the present level of interest rates were too high, too low or about right, he did not answer the question, but we should not be surprised about that because he does not answer any questions on matters of economic policy. He said that long-term interest rates are too high and something should be done about that. When he was asked what should be done, he said we should increase investment as if that would bring down interest rates.

Apart from the fact that that is economic gobbledegook, the reason why we have higher real interest rates than Germany is that we have a poor record on inflation over a 35-year period and people still do not believe that successive British Governments will commit themselves to consistently low inflation, although the very low inflation under the present Government will clearly remain in place under the present arrangements vis-à-vis the Bank of England.

One reason why we have a wide differential is that the markets naturally fear that we may have another Labour Government and Labour has the worst record of all on inflation. Labour Members may find that amusing, but in 1975 we had 26 or 27 per cent. inflation under Denis Healey and gilts, which were issued on a coupon of about 15.5 per cent.—the highest ever interest—not surprisingly, were known in the market as Healeys. Gilts are no longer issued at those excessive rates of interest today because we have low interest rates and low inflation, but the markets fear what Labour might do because of its appalling record. That is one reason why we have to bear the burden of higher real interest rates. To believe that increased investment will somehow solve the problem is to get the argument the wrong way around.

If one were to single out one criterion against which to assess whether the Government are pursuing a successful economic policy, undoubtedly opinions would differ as to what that should be. However, I believe that many people would choose to use the level and the trend of unemployment. On that score, the Government's record is one of the most successful in the European Union.

[Mr. Tim Smith]

Of course, it suits the hon. Member for Oxford, East simply to quote the absolute figures and to say that the present level of unemployment is still too high at 2.2 million. I agree with that. However, we should compare our record with that of the other major member states of the European Union. Unemployment in France is rising and Germany faces considerable difficulties because of the huge on-costs associated with the employment of labour. Spain, under a socialist Government, has an unemployment rate of more than 20 per cent. Those countries have much higher rates of unemployment than Britain and they do not know how to tackle the problem.

Mr. Andrew Smith: While the hon. Gentleman is making comparisons, will he recognise, first, that we are not talking about absolute numbers: we are talking about people, their lives and their prospects of making a decent livelihood? Secondly, will he tell the House why average unemployment under the last Labour Government was 960,000 when it has been 2.4 million under this Government since 1979?

Mr. Tim Smith: I agree that the absolute number refers to an absolute number of people. That is why I have said that 2.2 million is an unacceptably high level of unemployment. My point is that the Government have put in place policies that are designed to decrease the level of unemployment by reducing employers' payroll costs. For example, the £500 million that will be raised by the landfill tax will be used to reduce a levy on employment. That is extremely welcome.

The Labour party wants to impose extra costs on employers—I suspect that that is what the Leader of the Opposition meant in his speech about a stakeholder economy. That is what the social chapter is about: it would introduce the very costs which are driving German manufacturers to ensure that products are manufactured anywhere but in Germany, where manufacturing costs are high. Although the present level of unemployment is too high, we can be proud of our job creation record.

Another criterion that one might choose is manufacturing productivity. Our record in that area is even better, as all independent assessments show that we have narrowed the gap with Germany very substantially in the past 16 years. On that basis, I believe that we have a successful and a growing economy.

I now turn to the Finance Bill and to the subject of self-assessment, which the hon. Member for Oxford, East touched upon. I do not think that there is any disagreement about the principle of self-assessment. I understand that the Opposition support the introduction of self-assessment and the Public Accounts Committee has argued consistently for a change from the prior to the current basis of assessment for the self-employed.

Self-assessment has had a long programme of introduction and I pay tribute to the Inland Revenue for the work that it has done. It has bent over backwards to consult taxpayers, to whom it has sent sample tax returns. We must accept the fact that, when one introduces a change of that kind, some people will pay no attention to it until the new tax return lands on their doormats. However, I do not believe that we should criticise the Inland Revenue, which has made a great effort to consult taxpayers.

The Inland Revenue recently sent a tax return consultation pack to all Members of Parliament. I do not know whether anyone has taken the trouble to read it, but when I received the pack requesting my comments I telephoned the Inland Revenue. Three officials came to see me and I discussed with them the form that they proposed to send to Members of Parliament. It seemed to be unnecessarily complex compared with the present system. I am glad to say that the form has been simplified considerably for the latest round of consultation. However, I understand that Inland Revenue must ensure that every contingency and possible situation is dealt with, which leads to a degree of complexity.

I think that we should allow the measure to proceed. I shall be interested to hear the arguments that are advanced in Committee, as I do not see how one can defer one part of it while introducing another. That does not make a great deal of sense to me, but we shall discuss the matter in detail in Committee.

The right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) referred to tax simplification. I welcome the report that the Inland Revenue published before Christmas to comply with section 160 of the Finance Act 1995. I particularly welcome the fact that the Inland Revenue seems to have had a substantial change of heart and that there appears to be the political will to address the problem.

The right hon. Gentleman was correct to draw the attention of the House to the speed at which the size of Finance Bills has increased. I have the figures for recent years. In 1986 the Finance Bill was 265 pages long. I think that the right hon. Gentleman said that this year's legislation comprised 408 pages. In 1993 it was 415 pages, in 1994 it was 616 pages and last year it was 505 pages. So we have seen a huge growth in the size of the legislation. Of course, the problem is not simply the growth in the legislation—if it were clear and easy to understand perhaps we would have no difficulty. More important is the complexity of the legislation.

I think that Inland Revenue has been persuaded that the problem is of sufficient scale that it must be tackled. I believe that the exercise will be justified in terms of the benefits that will accrue, although I know that some cost will be involved. However, I do not suppose that the man on the Clapham omnibus will be much the wiser. We are currently concerned that professional tax advisers—accountants and lawyers—find the legislation difficult to understand. That is not a satisfactory situation and we must address the problem. Fortunately, most taxpayers are pay-as-you-earn and they do not need to read the Finance Bill every year—which is just as well—but we must produce intelligible legislation for sophisticated taxpayers and professional tax advisers. I believe that the Treasury is now committed to a programme that will deliver the desired benefits.

Of course, some consideration must be given to the parliamentary procedures, as the change will fall somewhere between consolidation legislation and the major changes in the law that we associate with a Finance Bill. As it will give rise to voluminous documentation, I believe that the Procedure Committee should consider how we shall deal with it.

The right hon. Member for Llanelli mentioned Pepper *v.* Hart. I do not think that the concerns are as great as he suggested because Pepper *v.* Hart applies only where the law is absolutely ambiguous and it is not possible for the

court to determine what Parliament intended simply on the basis of the words of the Act. It is only in those circumstances—which hopefully shall be rare when we simplify the wording of the legislation—that the courts will refer to *Hansard* to see what was said.

However, I agree that it must affect the way in which Ministers approach matters in Committee if they know that their every word will be scrutinised in the same manner as the words of the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) in the matter of Pepper *v.* Hart, which I understand related to the 1976 or 1977 finance legislation. I welcome the tax simplification programme and I hope that we shall be able to make good progress with it.

Finally, while I welcome the fact that charities will be assisted by the increase in the maximum amount under the give-as-you-earn scheme from £75 to £100 per month, they will lose out as a result of a reduction in the standard rate of income tax. Although the Government have done a great deal in the past few years to encourage people to give money to charities—there is no tax reason to prevent it, as it is an extremely tax-efficient exercise—charities have been subjected to considerable extra taxation. I refer particularly to the value added tax burden on charities.

The Charities Tax Reform Group has made proposals to Treasury Ministers for a scheme that would provide some relief to charities on the VAT that they incur—not on the costs of running the charity but the charitable services that they provide. I am sorry that up to now it has not been possible to persuade my right hon. and hon. Friends of the merits of such a scheme, which would not be hugely expensive but which would be of great benefit to many charities that do such important work in our community.

Notwithstanding its length and complexity, I welcome the Bill, in particular the balanced tax changes and tax reductions included within it, and I look forward to the debates in Committee.

6.30 pm

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): I have listened carefully and with interest to comments that have been made by hon. Members, on both sides of the House, about the increasing length and complexity of tax legislation. I am sure that with legislation, as with any other document, the longer, more complicated and detailed it becomes, the more likely it is that one will lose sight of the strategic objective—the purpose for which the legislation is intended.

I take the House back to 1992 to the general election, when the Conservative party hustled its way back into power with fanciful and fabricated allegations about Labour's tax plans. I believe that the Conservative party's posters warning the public of Labour's tax bombshell will come back to haunt it, because the reality in Finance Acts since then is that the tax bombshell has been imposed by the Conservative party. I asked the Library to compare the tax burden under the Conservatives during their 16 or 17 years in office with that under the previous Labour Government. I expected the rosy picture painted by Conservative Members to be somewhat dented, but nothing prepared me for the magnitude of the Tory tax rises, not just in the few years since the 1992 general election but in the whole period during which they have been in power.

In every year since 1979, taxes have been higher in real terms than in 1978-79, when Labour was in government, and higher in real terms than in any year during the last Labour Government. Last year, the Government raised £236.6 billion in taxes. In 1978-79, at current prices, the Labour Government raised £170.9 billion. In cash terms, the Labour Government, in their last year of office, raised some £58.6 billion, which shows, among other things, the inflation that we have had since the Conservatives have been in office, because the pound is now worth barely more than one third of its 1978-79 value.

If the Conservatives had kept tax down in real terms to the level of the last Labour Government, they would have collected almost £0.75 trillion less—£735 billion less—from the pockets of British taxpayers. That amounts to some £32,000 per household in Britain—or more than £2,000 per year for each of the 16 years that they have been in office. Conservative Members might well say that one would expect the overall tax burden to rise because of overall growth in the economy. That is a weak argument from a party that promised to cut public spending in real terms, to cut the size, power and spending of the state, but it is an argument that I take seriously.

I asked the Library to look at the tax take under the Conservatives and under the previous Labour Government as a percentage of our national income. In 15 out of the 16 years in which the Conservatives have been in office, the proportion of the country's gross domestic product that they have taken in tax has been higher than under the previous Labour Government. In 1978-79, under Labour, taxation took 34.3 per cent. of GDP. During the 16 years that the Conservatives have been in power, it has averaged 37.3 per cent. of GDP—three full percentage points more than under the previous Labour Government. That illustrates clearly—the figures were prepared by the economic, policy and statistics section of the Library—the real cost of Conservative Finance Bills.

In 1987, in the Conservative manifesto, the Conservatives promised:

"we are engaged in steadily reducing the share of the nation's income taken by the State."

That was and is a lie. Between 1979 and 1987, the percentage of GDP taken in taxation rose from 34.3 per cent. under Labour to 38.1 per cent. under the Conservatives.

The 1987 manifesto also promised:

"In the next Parliament:
We aim to reduce the burden of taxation."

What happened? Between 1987 and 1992, the tax burden imposed by the Conservatives rose from £147 billion to £221 billion, or at constant prices from £211 billion to £231 billion—a 9.2 per cent. increase in the tax burden in real terms.

The same approach was taken at the last general election. In their 1992 manifesto, the Conservatives said:

"We are the only party that understands the need for low taxation."

They may understand it, but they do not do it.

Since the last election, the tax burden for a typical family in Britain has increased by £600 a year. The Government really do need to give the British public, who are faced with an ever-mounting burden of taxation, an answer to the question: where has their money gone? Some £14 billion was squandered on the poll tax—an ill-conceived and failed policy, which was eventually abandoned but at great cost to the taxpayer. The NHS administrative reforms cost an additional £1 billion a year.

[Mr. Hugh Bayley]

Rail privatisation proposals will cost some £850 million a year. Low pay subsidies—the payment of family credit to people on ever-lower wages—cost the average taxpayer £100 a year. The common agricultural policy costs an average family £20 a week.

It was Benjamin Franklin who said:

"In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes."

The two go together. These Tory tax rises will result in the death of the Tory party. If one looks at Conservative Members, one sees a party bickering with itself, Members arguing with each other, trying to justify their individual positions. One sees a party in its death throes. Some Conservative Members realise that. Some do not. Those who do not are those who have swallowed their own propaganda about Tory tax cuts so often that they have come to believe them. That lie is a poison for the people of this country and it is eating away at the heart of the Conservative party. It is that poison that is giving the Conservative party such an ugly final few months before it fails and dies.

6.38 pm

Sir Terence Higgins (Worthing): In the Budget debate, I quoted Iain Macleod's most frequently quoted view that a Budget that looked bad on Budget day might look a lot better by the time we came to the Finance Bill, and conversely, if it was good at the time of the Budget the reverse was the case. I feel bound to say that we are now debating the Finance Bill. It looked pretty good on Budget day and it looks pretty good now. It was entirely appropriate to the economic circumstances in which the Chancellor found himself, and I felt that he was given a grossly unfair press the next day. In fact, the economy is now in a very good state in terms of the level of inflation and prospects of growth. Having said that, however, let me add that there are serious dangers ahead in terms of both timing and balance—in particular, the balance between fiscal and monetary policy.

When I said what I did at the time of the Budget, I did not envisage the extent to which Iain Macleod's name would be headline news by the time of Second Reading of the Finance Bill. Following Lady Thatcher's speech, numerous headlines have referred to Mr. Macleod—who, it must be admitted, was the personification of one-nation Toryism. Margaret Thatcher and I learnt our trade—if I may put it that way—dealing with Finance Bills on the Opposition Front Bench under Iain Macleod's tutelage; I do not recall her referring disparagingly to one-nation Toryism then, or using words such as "baloney". Had she done so, I would have remembered, because Iain Macleod would undoubtedly have made an appropriate response.

I find it sad that Lady Thatcher is so out of touch. She now seems even to confuse one-nation Toryism with an enthusiasm for European federalism. I believe that the Prime Minister, like me, is a one-nation Tory, but neither of us is in favour of European federalism, and what is nowadays described as a "coded attack" struck me as entirely wrong in this instance.

It is true, however, that the Bill needs to be put into a European context. Certain clauses refer to the European Community's second VAT simplification directive. I was responsible for steering the original VAT legislation through the House; the so-called simplification directive, and the related clauses in the Bill, merely seek to make less complicated a change that complicated the original legislation. The provisions continue for pages and pages, allegedly simplifying the position, but if the arrangements had been left as they were when I introduced them there would have been no need for "simplification". The position is already much simpler than it will be after the implementation of the clauses and a huge schedule.

There is, however, a more important reason for seeing the Bill in a European context. Clearly, part of the Government's general fiscal policy—indeed, in a sense, the central part—relates to whether we are likely to meet the so-called Maastricht criteria, regardless of whether we decide to participate in European monetary union. Countries throughout the European Union seem to be trying to meet those criteria. As I pointed out in an intervention following the Prime Minister's return from the last European summit, there is considerable confusion over the expression "single currency". It is important to get the semantics right. It is inconceivable that we will achieve a single currency across the entire European Union as it currently stands; we are discussing whether there should be a core currency. That is relevant to the Bill, and to the general attitude to budget deficits.

The Chancellor has a wider remit than the Finance Bill, although it is part of the policy. If there is to be a core currency, and if the United Kingdom is to achieve the Maastricht criteria and a degree of convergence, he must consider whether it is advantageous for the UK to join the core currency. Those who join the currency will give up, for all time, the main means of adjusting to differential movements in costs and prices. If they join prematurely, they will risk facing either patches of endemic and indefinite unemployment, or a need for large subsidies from one area to another. The United Kingdom is, after all, engaged in a global rather than a purely European economy, and it is therefore important for us to make the choice; but insufficient consideration has been given to whether we should be inside the core currency—if, indeed, it comes about.

There is also concern about the timetable. There is an increasing tendency for countries throughout the European Union to rush—or attempt to rush—towards the Maastricht criteria in relation to budget deficits. It cannot be seriously disputed that that is likely to have a severe deflationary effect. I read with great interest in this morning's *Financial Times* a summary of an interview with Mr. Alexandre Lamfalussy, president of the European Monetary Institute: apparently, he has

"rejected the idea that Europe is heading for a recession that would jeopardise European monetary union."

Surely that has the position back to front. The danger is that if we rush towards a policy of cutting budget deficits throughout Europe, a move towards EMU will jeopardise employment. Mr. Lamfalussy, however, is enthusiastic about such policies.

In the context of a Finance Bill that attempts to adjust the fiscal balance, it is important for us to encourage the Chancellor—in his wider remit—to take such issues into account and, in particular, to suggest to our European partners that it is dangerous to take such action.

In any event, I find it extraordinary that we should consider meeting the Maastricht criteria on such matters as budget deficits and, at a certain point, say, "Snap!

We will join." We have no reason to suppose that those circumstances will continue over any length of time. Surely the countries concerned ought to have met the criteria for at least two or three years; otherwise their commitment is irrevocable. Short of the kind of break-up that we saw in the Soviet Union, once a country is part of a single currency it is stuck with it, and so far there has been no adequate analysis of the ways of escaping.

Mr. Forman: Is not my right hon. Friend saying something even more significant than he has let on? Is not he saying that, if monetary union over any area within the 15 member states of the European Union is to succeed in the longer term, it must be made reversible in some sense?

Sir Terence Higgins: As I was saying when I gave way to my hon. Friend, no one seems to have analysed that properly. As I said before, the idea that one can establish a single currency in the whole of the European Union—especially now that, I am happy to say, it has now been expanded—is wholly unrealistic on any conceivable time scale. In the context of the Bill, I think that the Chancellor needs to be encouraged to bring a sense of realism to such matters and a sense of the dangers of proceeding in the way in which Mr. Lamfalussy, for example, envisages.

I was in other parts of the European Union last week and found that increasing concern of the type that I have just expressed was very apparent. After all, other members of the European Union are proceeding against a background of growth rates worse than ours. I am thinking of, for example, Germany.

It is important to bear in mind the implications of the problems that I have outlined for the balance between fiscal and monetary policy. Effectively, we are creating an ever tighter fiscal policy but with total disregard for the economic situation. That is very strange. I am sure that the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) will not be able to recall any Government saying that they were going to cut Budget deficits with no account being taken of the level of unemployment or what stage of the economic cycle they were in at the time. Regardless of where we are in the economic cycle, the idea recently has been that we must cut deficits.

I view with perhaps more equanimity than the Chancellor the extent of the Budget deficit when we are in an economic situation such as this. Clearly, inflation is now well under control, but I am worried that the rate of growth is not as fast as it could be. Of course, when the Budget was announced, many people thought that the growth rate predicted by the Chancellor was unlikely to be achieved unless there were also cuts in interest rates. I am glad that the Chancellor subsequently cut interest rates, and I believe that the Budget and the Bill provide a good background for him to make further moves in that direction.

The relationship between the deficit, the money supply and the rate of interest is complex, but a further tightening of fiscal policy should enable the deficit to be reduced and be financed at lower interest rates without generating further inflationary pressures or an excessive increase in the money supply. I hope that in this context, too, the Chancellor will consider timing and balance.

I wish to say a word or two about the comments of one of my successors as a Treasury Minister, the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies). I have much sympathy with what he said. The first time that a draft clause was added to a Finance Bill for a particular tax change was in connection with value added tax. I commend that to my hon. Friends on the Front Bench as it is a good innovation.

One of the effects of the timetable change to our Finance Bill debates this year and for the previous couple of years is that there is very little time for consultation between the Budget being announced and the Finance Bill being published. Most of the available time is taken up by the Christmas and new year holiday. At this point, it might be worth commenting in passing on our economic statistics on growth. The entire country effectively goes on holiday for two weeks at Christmas and new year. Two weeks is quite a high percentage of the year as there are only 52 weeks in one year—perhaps we should adjust the gross national product figures accordingly.

The so-called unified Budget has been introduced, but we still have no opportunity to debate expenditure in any great detail. We shall grind through the Committee stage on the Floor of the House, the Committee stage upstairs and the Report stage, all of which deal with taxation, but there is still no time to discuss the expenditure side of the equation. Having said that, I believe that the Budget was an appropriate one.

It is a matter of some concern to our constituents that when they see our proceedings on television there appear to be very few of us in the Chamber. That has been exacerbated by the fact that many hon. Members now have a direct feed line from the Chamber to their offices. One is sometimes surprised when, once one has finished speaking and gone to the Tea Room, colleagues there say that they wholly disagree with what one has just said although they were not in the Chamber to hear the speech. The only solution is to have cameras facing in the other direction too so that the public can see hon. Members busily signing their letters while watching proceedings in the Chamber.

The prospects for the economy are now extremely good, but there is a real danger in an over-enthusiastic approach to proceedings in Europe. I firmly believe that being in Europe is the right way forward, but I am worried that the single market may be endangered if only some of its members join a single currency. None the less, the Finance Bill is an important building block, and I believe that the Chancellor and Treasury team should be congratulated.

6.55 pm

Mr. Ian Pearson (Dudley, West): Writing nearly 300 years ago, Pope could have been talking about the Government and the Bill when he wrote of the "wounded snake" that

" drags its slow length along."

At 408 pages long, the Bill represents a 15 per cent. rise in output from the combined talents of the parliamentary and private sector drafting staff compared with the previous year. It has a third more clauses, adding to the 1,500 pages of primary tax legislation already introduced in the past five years. However, its size cannot obscure its failings.

This is a wholly inadequate Bill. Never before has such a big fig leaf been used to cover so little. The simple truth is that it does nothing to encourage investment and jobs,

[Mr. Ian Pearson]

nothing to provide opportunities for all and nothing to curb the excesses of the privatised utilities or improve the profitability of small businesses.

The Bill does nothing to close tax loopholes. Because of the Government's incompetence, taxpayers are subsidising corporate raiders—like Granada in its bid for Forte and National Power in its offer for Southern Electricity—to the tune of hundreds of millions of pounds through a loophole involving the use of special dividends in takeovers. When will the Government act in the public interest and end this scandalous state of affairs? This fig leaf of a Bill hides a Budget packet of minuscule proportions, and everyone knows it.

The CBI said of the Budget that it

"would have preferred to see more measures to encourage investment."

The Federation of Small Businesses is on record as saying that it was "extremely disappointed" by the Chancellor's speech and that

"there has been absolutely no encouragement for growth".

Its chairman said:

"I doubt whether the speech will win many votes from our members".

I think that she is right. Opinion polls also show that the British people have rumbled the Budget and the Government.

Even Government Back Benchers have twigged that the Budget is not up to much. The hon. Member for North-West Surrey (Sir M. Grylls), who is not here at the moment, is the chairman of the Small Business Bureau. He was reported in *The Daily Telegraph* of 29 October as saying that he was

"disappointed at the absence of measures to encourage investment, particularly among businesses in the £3m to £50m a year turnover bracket."

He is right to be disappointed. The United Kingdom is currently 11th in the European Union in terms of investment per head of population—that is not nearly good enough. Nearly three years ago, the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the right hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo), who I understand is feeling persecuted these days, optimistically claimed that the 1993 Finance Bill was

"putting in place the biggest ever deregulatory package for small businesses."—[*Official Report*, 26 April 1993; Vol. 223, c. 731.]

Parliamentary rules and natural politeness prevent me from saying exactly what I think of that claim. Suffice to say, I have not met a single business man who thinks that there is less red tape today than there was three years ago. Nor have I seen a single credible survey of businesses which suggests that the regulatory burden has decreased.

Speaking in the debate on the previous Finance Bill, the right hon. Member for South Thanet (Mr. Aitken), last year's Chief Secretary—who could also be forgiven for thinking "infamy, infamy, they've all got it in for me", to quote the late Kenneth Williams—said:

"As for simplifying the tax system, the unwelcome size and weight of the Finance Bill highlights the strange paradox that simplification can be a complicated business, at least in terms of legislation."—[*Official Report*, 17 January 1995; Vol. 252, c. 596.]

I am still relatively new to the House, but I recognise absolute rubbish when I see it. I trust that this year's Chief Secretary will have none of it, and that in Committee he will devote his full attention to the many inquiries we will make and amendments on which we will probe him, rather than be diverted by a certain inquiry elsewhere.

In speaking in favour of the Opposition amendment, I must point out that the Government ignore at their peril the overwhelming public support for welfare to work measures, for tackling the privatised utilities abuses, for implementing Greenbury in full, for cutting VAT on domestic fuel and for measures to stimulate long-term investment.

People and businesses in Dudley, West wanted a very different Budget. I shall highlight three areas on which, should I be appointed to serve on the Standing Committee, I intend to consider tabling new clauses. First, I remain as convinced as I was last year that there is a compelling case for specific, limited tax breaks to help hard-hit high streets that have been devastated by major, out-of-town retail developments such as Merry Hill in my constituency. I also believe that the Government could be far more imaginative in using tax breaks to encourage investment and economic regeneration.

Secondly, changes are needed to the tax treatment of retained profits in privately owned businesses. The tax system discourages retained profits, as it is more tax efficient to withdraw capital and invest it in another's business. That needs to be changed.

I would also like the small firms loan guarantee scheme to be reformed. It is not particularly popular in the market, and it is certainly not a competitive package when compared with that offered to German or Japanese firms. We must seriously consider adopting the German and Japanese models of encouraging long-term investment. As a recent 3i report says, Britain's small companies have the

"shortest financing horizons in Europe".

The report also states that they have

"inherently more risky capital structures".

That must be changed and the reform of the small firms loan guarantee scheme could play a role in that.

Thirdly, the deregulation initiative has been a major disappointment, and the small business litmus test is not working adequately. The Government are still listening too much to large companies and too little to small businesses. The Government have also chickened out on proposals to merge the Inland Revenue with the Contributions Agency. I believe that they should not only do that but join those institutions together with most of Customs and Excise. A number of major improvements could be made.

The Budget offers little or nothing for small businesses, and it does not address the real needs of the United Kingdom economy. It allows the perpetuation of major tax loopholes and abuses of the system, and I urge the Government to introduce new clauses to change that.

7.4 pm

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I am sure you will agree, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that during the time you have been in the Chair we have heard a wide, interesting and even discursive range of speeches, which must have been loosely connected because they were in order. I have benefited from the thoughts expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

I shall inject a little party political enthusiasm into the debate—but not too much. I took the opportunity when I was waiting to speak to read the Labour amendment more closely. It is an extraordinary paragraph, as I shall seek to show. These days, more clarity and honesty come from hon. Members on the Opposition Back Benches than from those on the Front Bench, who seem to work on the principle of "can't say, won't say". We had another example of that today. Whenever the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) was questioned about anything, he took refuge in a great deal of waffle, as has been mentioned.

I shall attempt to elucidate, for the benefit of the House and posterity, the words of the Opposition amendment. It mentions the desirability of a boost for long-term investment, as the hon. Member for Dudley, West (Mr. Pearson) said. If there is ever to be a Labour Government, that will imply some quite serious changes in the tax regime to dividends and some significant changes to the burden of proof in contested takeovers. Those two points are of quasi-industrial policy rather than finance policy, and people outside should take them into account.

The amendment refers to the introduction of a welfare to work strategy. I am not quite sure what that means and we received no clarification from the hon. Member for Oxford, East. I suspect that it has something to do with the introduction of a statutory minimum wage and signing up to the European social chapter, but unless the Labour party intends to adopt the proposal of the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) for compulsory private insurance, I fail to understand what that slogan means.

We hear much from the Opposition about a windfall tax on the utilities. It is a favourite refuge of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), who uses it every time we ask where the money will come from. Such a tax is economically illiterate. The hon. Gentleman gives the clear impression that the Labour party would seek to fund many recurrent expenditure commitments with a one-off windfall tax. That does not add up and it would do considerable damage to many of the small shareholders attracted to our share-owning democracy through privatisation of the utilities.

The amendment also mentions the old chestnut of cutting VAT on domestic fuel—something about which Labour Members were confused when they failed to vote for proposals tabled by the Liberal party to cut VAT by even more. Yet the only likely result of such a cut would be to reduce revenue substantially with no obvious way of making up the shortfall. The Labour party would have to address that problem in a future Finance Bill, if it ever had the chance.

The amendment also mentions implementing the Greenbury report in full, yet there seems to be confusion in new Labour about the ability of middle and senior management to be substantial stakeholders in a booming economy. I do not believe that the economy would be booming under a Labour Government, but they might inherit the fruits of Conservative good management of the economy. At any rate, all those in middle and senior management should be warned that they will not be expected or allowed to be part of the stakeholder society.

In the Budget debate before Christmas, and since, there has been a lot of talk about reforming and simplifying the private finance initiative. Try as hard as one might to elucidate what the Opposition have in mind, it seems to be very much to be a policy of calculated ambiguity. I, for one, am not yet clear whether the Labour party is in favour of the PFI and wants more of it, or is against it and wants less of it. A certain difficulty arises because the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) claims to have invented it some years ago, in the transport sector. It is clear, however, that some of his hon. Friends are less sure about the PFI, because they believe that it is simply a way of getting some lumps of public expenditure off the books on to the private sector accounts.

We heard some very confusing words from the hon. Member for Oxford, East—some of them in answer to my intervention—on the subject of self-assessment. The hon. Gentleman and the Opposition amendment seem to call for the reform of that great scheme, which has been many years in preparation. I, too, commend the Revenue on the way in which it has sought to consult everybody about it. When I questioned the hon. Gentleman on that point in an innocent and friendly way, as is my wont, I gathered that the Opposition's policy is little more than one of prevarication, and possibly partial reform. I shall try to explain later why that would probably be worse than no reform. If one is to introduce self-assessment, one needs to be bold and comprehensive. If one sets out to do it, one needs to do it properly.

As the House will probably recall, I welcomed the Budget for its responsibility. I welcome the Finance Bill for many of its component parts. It is not the world's most exciting Finance Bill, but in many ways that is a function of the fact that it was a responsible Budget. I am particularly pleased about the 20 per cent. lower tax band on savings income. That change is important and long overdue. Since so much of the taxation on income is now already at 20 per cent., and only at 20 per cent.—one third of all taxpayers now pay income tax only at 20 per cent.—it was a sensible extension to introduce the lower rate on savings income.

Mr. Denzil Davies: Can the hon. Gentleman explain why he thinks taxing income from investment—in this case, investment in a building society—at a lower rate than taxing income from employment is right?

Mr. Forman: Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman was not completely following my argument. I was saying that a third of all income tax payers already pay at 20 per cent. only. As I understand Government policy, which has been frequently spelt out on various occasions, the idea is to move progressively, as and when we can afford it, to making the 20p rate the standard rate of income tax. It is no bad thing to make sure that taxation on income from savings is set at 20 per cent. Contrary to what the Labour party says, those savings are not unearned income, because someone has earned it at some time—either the person himself or herself or perhaps, in the case of inherited income, a family member of an earlier generation. Whichever way one looks at it, that change is a healthy development.

The hon. Member for Dudley, West was fairly disparaging about the Chancellor's efforts to assist small businesses. None the less, it is welcome that the rate of corporation tax on small businesses has been cut to 24p in the pound. I hope that other measures will flow not only within the Exchequer remit but from the Department of Trade and Industry further to assist small businesses, especially in the realm of credit, late payment and other such problems.

[Mr. Forman]

I was pleased by the measures to give further fiscal encouragement to employee share ownership. Perhaps I should declare a non-pecuniary interest to the House as I am an honorary director of Job Ownership Ltd., which has been campaigning for the very cause of employee share ownership for some considerable time. It is good to see the way in which the Government have responded to pressure from that quarter and others.

The Finance Bill contains a nice small measure to exonerate vintage cars over the age of 25 years from vehicle excise duty. I note that my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. Butler) is nodding in approval. It is true that many cars over 25 years of age are excellent vehicles. Members of vintage car clubs in or near my constituency have written to me to say how pleased they are with that small measure.

The most important thing about the Budget and the Finance Bill in the modern global economy is that they should be understood and, if possible, well received in the markets. It is sometimes thought that the global discipline to which we must now get used applies only to monetary policy and that only that policy must be kept in line with global market opinion. That is no longer the case because, increasingly, monetary, fiscal and supply side policy need to be competitive in the new global economy. The fiscal stance influences the global bond markets greatly, and hence the price that must be paid for money and investment in this country.

Since Budgets and Finance Bills can help or hinder the supply side of the economy, it is important to consider economic policy as a whole because that is what the markets and market analysts increasingly do. I hope very much that when the House considers Finance Bills in the future, this one included, it will always have in mind the monetary and supply side background, and the real conditions in which all national Governments now have to seek to steer their economies. Increasingly, those economies are no longer national ones but merely subsets of a much larger global economy.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor pointed out in evidence to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee on which I am pleased to serve,

> "You get punished more quickly if you get it wrong in today's global environment."

How right he is and what a compelling argument for introducing what, by any reckoning, has been a responsible Budget and a responsible Finance Bill.

My right hon. and learned Friend is therefore to be commended for what he has done. The Budget was well received at the time, if in slightly sotto voce tones, and is proving to have a considerable shelf life, as I predicted. It has already created the fiscal conditions in which it has been prudent and possible to reduce interest rates. It should be possible to repeat that medicine as the year goes by.

My right hon. and learned Friend had to be cautious in present conditions because of the lack of buoyancy in the revenue—something to which we paid considerable attention in our Select Committee investigation—notably in income tax, corporation tax and VAT, which are three of the big engines of revenue in our economy. As the Select Committee pointed out, it is important to decide—we did not come to any final view, so I hope that the Government can help us in due course—whether that lack of buoyancy in the revenue in the year just ending was an aberration or whether it betokens a changed relationship of a more long-term character between the level of domestic activity and the level of taxation collected—in other words, the elasticity and efficiency of the tax system.

Whatever the final answers to that conundrum may be, the situation underlines the need to recognise that we must strive to keep the system, structure and the rates of taxation in our economy as competitive as possible with other national tax jurisdictions. I have given that message in previous debates and I make no apology for repeating it, because I believe that the House of Commons—the heart of the nation, the supreme legislative body and all the other things on which we pride ourselves—needs to take account of the fact that, in a world of mobile capital and mobile individuals and corporations, we cannot afford to let our system and structure of taxation or our rates of taxation become too far out of line with those of our principal competitors in the OECD countries and in the more super-competitive countries on the Pacific rim and elsewhere. The Pacific rim is quite fashionable these days, so I hope that that point will not be lost on the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling).

We should try to see that our tax system gives the country a continuing comparative advantage, if at all possible, in the increasingly fierce competition for globally mobile capital and increasingly skilled people. In that context, I hope that when circumstances next permit—probably next November—my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor will look more favourably than he was able to do last year on measures of bolder tax reform, designed to boost aggregate savings and investment. That was one of the missing pieces in this year's Budget. I understand why my right hon. and learned Friend may have decided eventually that he could not afford that particular political risk, but I hope that he will pull the proposals—perhaps those that I have put to him—out of the drawer again and find out whether there is merit in the idea for future years. This is an early Budget representation for next year.

This measure would assist people in their efforts to increase their financial security, and of course the Finance Bill has already done quite a bit in relation to long-term care for the elderly, which is to be welcomed. At the same time, it would enable us as a country to generate more of the funds for the extra investment that we shall need to finance the innovation that this country absolutely must have to remain internationally competitive. Without a stronger investment preference than we have exhibited in recent years, and the greater efficiency that can flow from that investment, if well directed, we will fall increasingly far behind in international competition.

It is therefore worth rehearsing once again the case for a simple, attractive savings incentive scheme to replace tax-exempt special savings accounts, personal equity plans and all the other mechanisms that tend to displace savings from one heading to another rather than to increase aggregate savings. The scheme would be called, say, a personal investment plan—a PIP for short—and would offer perhaps up to £10,000 a year of personal savings in any savings vehicle, to be completely free of tax. It could be self-assessed, which is in tune with the

flavour of the times, and self-certified, with the need only to have tough penalties for anyone who attempts to defraud the Revenue by not fully and properly declaring revenue from such sources, as from other sources.

I hope therefore that the Chancellor of the Exchequer and his right hon. and hon. Friends will reconsider this idea. It is full of merit and would help us to get up the international savings table and hence up the international investment table, which, as I am sure Opposition Members would agree, is important.

I cannot help but be struck by the extent to which we have debated not only the Bill's substance but some of our procedures. It seems clear—and it has seemed to me for many years to be clear—that, in dealing with such a Bill, its length is obviously a problem for the House. It is significant that the Bill is now in two volumes. However, the length in itself will not necessarily make it more obscure. From time to time, length can clarify if the language used is appropriate.

If the language were to be merely purposive, as the tax experts say, we would be passing more responsibility to the courts, as the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) told us in his powerful speech, which I hope Ministers will read because he made some good points. Brevity might have the effect, paradoxically, merely of favouring declaratory law rather than law that removes the burden of doubt and complexity. Clarity may, paradoxically, need more words to explain Parliament's real intentions, but those words should be plainer and clearer—that should be the priority.

If that does not work—I suspect that none of these well-intentioned aspirations will necessarily work—we may have to revisit the need to reform the House's procedures when dealing with financial legislation of this sort, recalling some of the recommendations, as you will, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the Armstrong committee report in the early 1980s which the Government did not substantially pursue, except the one for a unified Budget, which they did. We must find ways of making these debates more relevant and more important, not just to the media and the public outside—which is, of course, of interest in a democracy—but, more especially, to our right hon. and hon. Friends who, even as I speak are sitting in their office, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins), said, looking at the colour of my tie and noting whether I am self-confident, when they should be in the Chamber listening to my words of wisdom and to those of everyone else.

We may have to consider some radical procedural measures. I am not going to go into this now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because it would be an abuse of your courtesy in allowing me to pursue this point, but you will know that, on the continent, it is common practice for draft clauses and legislation in a preliminary phase to be considered in detail by competent committees, and then for the plenary session to come in at a much later stage to ratify their work. That would indeed be a radical solution and I would press it only if our present procedures are not adequate to deal with Finance Bills as important and complex as this one.

This is a responsible Budget. It is reflected in an interesting and worthwhile Finance Bill with many good components and I wish the Government well in their endeavours over the coming months.

7.24 pm

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South-East): I congratulate the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman). If anyone on the Labour Back Benches expresses a view, that is a split in the Labour party, but when the hon. Gentleman expresses a view, that is a suggestion to the Government. He should make his mind up. He and some of his hon. Friends have been a revelation to Labour Members. He has suddenly discovered the global economy. When they attack the Labour Government of 1974-79, some of his hon. Friends forget that there was a global economy then. We all remember what happened during the oil crisis and with the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries, but Conservative Members forget such things.

When, earlier, the brain drain was being used to justify the Government's policies since 1979, especially those in relation to the rundown of manufacturing industry, I could not help but cast my mind back to the period between 1959 and 1964 when, under a Tory Government, there was also a brain drain—and everyone knew it. It is interesting that, between 1974 and 1979—under Labour—there was no brain drain.

I must remind the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington of the period 1970 to 1974 when, under a Tory Government, we had record inflation. Conservative Members conveniently forget that time. They poke fun at Labour Members who even hint at regulation in industry, but it was the hon. Gentleman's party that had to move in to prop up Rolls-Royce. I do not hear anything about that. Whenever Labour Members suggest any assistance to major industries, the allegation, as always, is, "That could be nationalisation through the back door." Conservative Members must start to think about where they are going.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury claims that he wants to reduce taxes and that this is a tax-cutting Budget. When we make any proposals or suggestions, Conservative Members say, "Ah. They want to increase expenditure." Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will explain why the Government claim that the Conservative party is a tax-cutting party, but lift the cap on local authorities, saying, "You can increase council tax by about 2 per cent." Conservative Members cannot have it both ways.

Negative equity is a double-edged sword in some ways. It involves not only the 1 million people who have had their homes repossessed, but the inner cities. In the part of Coventry that I represent, especially in the Hillfields, Stokealdermore and Willenhall areas, many shopkeepers are going out of business because of business tax. Furthermore, if they want to sell their property, they cannot. Many of them tell me that they want the Government to introduce some flexibility into that sector and to understand some of the problems of inner cities and areas such as Hillfields. I am sure that some of my colleagues would say the same. We will never regenerate inner cities unless there is some flexibility on business tax. If Treasury Ministers visit the Hillfields area of Coventry, we can show them the effects of the business tax. It is no good Ministers trying to blame local authorities, because what they can do is limited.

Another issue that will cause concern is rent capping. [HON. MEMBERS: "What?"] Some Conservative Members do not seem to know what the Government are proposing. Rent capping will have a major effect on capital

[Mr. Jim Cunningham]

investment in council house repairs. Conservative Members say that they want to do something about the inner cities, but they do not intend to do anything about rent capping. I have highlighted two points to which Conservative Members should be, but are not, addressing their minds.

Some other hon. Members have mentioned the global economy. Treasury Ministers have not yet told us how Britain will compete in the global economy. The general agreement on tariffs and trade and the Pacific rim countries are both important. Although 68 per cent. of our trade is with Europe, we need a positive response from the Government on the Pacific rim countries. I and a number of my colleagues have raised that matter for some time, but the Government do not seem to have a positive strategy for dealing with the global economy.

Nothing has been done to try to rejuvenate the building industry, which is as vital to the economy as is the industrial part of our economy; they go hand in hand. As long as we have an imbalance, we shall have a problem. We shall have 2.6 million unemployed because both those parts of our economy have a major effect. Nothing is being done in education and training, so if the economy really starts to take off, we shall have a major problem because of a lack of skills. Conservative Members may sit and smile; I do not mind. I suggest that the almost 60 million people outside the Chamber are not smiling as a result of Government policies.

It is not the Opposition's job at this stage to put forward policies; it is our job to look at the Budget and to highlight the problems with it. We will propose policies at the appropriate time. It is no good Conservative Members trying to deflect the flak to the Opposition when they should be taking the flak for their own actions.

7.31 pm

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): I intend to consider some of the issues that underlie our consideration of the Budget and some of the specific measures in it.

Not just in economic debates, but in debates on social policy and what we used to call the social wage, we have discussed the growing sense of insecurity felt by people who wonder whether their jobs are jobs for life and whether their work security is that which their fathers and grandfathers enjoyed. That factor is prayed in aid when we discuss the so-called feelgood factor and is the background against which we make policy in the House.

I contend that any political party that claims that it can make people secure in jobs for life is not living in the real world because the real world has changed drastically. Policies made by domestic Governments which it is proposed will do something about job security, but which do not take cognisance of the changes in the global economy, will fail. They must bring along with them a recognition that the world has changed for ever and that the circumstances in which young British people seek their place in the job market have changed for ever.

What do we do? There is an impact on our social as well as on our economic debates. Companies are producing their solutions and there is lots of jargon out there. In parenthesis, I must point out that the stakeholder debate took place in the mid-1980s under the guidance of people such as Professor Charles Handy and has been old hat for the past six or seven years. It has been discarded and people have moved on to other ideas.

Some of the ideas that companies are applying today are, I am afraid, surrounded by jargon. There are terms such as "business process re-engineering" and—

Mr. Forman: "Reinventing government".

Mr. Butcher: Yes, there is "reinventing government". There is an awful phrase, which I do not like, but which has started off a rather worrying debate—the "virtual company".

A virtual company is one that says, "We have certain core skills. We will protect those skills and develop them. There may be only 1,000 people at the core of our company whose jobs need to be preserved. Whereas we employ 10,000 people around that core 1,000, we may in future employ only 2,000 or 3,000 on short-term contracts. We will buy in the semi-skilled requirements that we may have in keeping our company alive." That virtual company changes its shape, its size, its objectives and its tactics with disconcerting speed.

If the House will excuse my using the jargon, dare I say that what we must move towards, frightening as it may seem at first blush, is a virtual economy—an economy in which we can have more security than countries that adopt a siege mentality and think, "We shall have more security, but we shall all gradually get poorer together and have within our society a group of people who will never be able to enter the job market." I shall develop that point a little further in the context of this and previous Budgets.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has said:

"UK economic performance in 1994 was impressive."

It has also said that the UK economy has

"been made more flexible, competitive and less inflation-prone by path-breaking structural reforms since 1979."

What are the choices before politicians, industrialists, Chancellors of the Exchequer and putative Chancellors of the Exchequer? There are two. We can have an economy, which we are slowly but surely developing, that is fast on its feet, can respond to pressures and can generate more jobs. One path to security is choice—seeing a job to go to after the one in which one has served for 10 years has disappeared because of global forces. One choice is to generate jobs in a virtual economy.

The second choice is the one that, day by day, inevitably and remorselessly, is being discredited in the practices of some of our western European colleagues. I refer, of course, to France, Belgium and Spain. Furthermore, after 40 brilliant years, a sclerotic economy is now starting to strangle that wonderful creation which came out of the German wirtschaftswunder. The Germans were fast on their feet in years gone by, but they have now started to opt for security at all costs, even if it means that they, too, must eventually embark on a path down which they become comparatively poorer.

That second option produces a rather tragic consequence. We rightly envy many parts of the French economy. The French have pursued cleverly their traditional mercantilist approach in terms of world markets and the generation of jobs at home, but the price

is one that no British Government can tolerate and in France it is becoming more intolerable by the day, as we have seen in the strikes on the streets.

The price is this: with the French obsession with security for the people who are in work and the price that that exacts is being developed an underclass of people who are detached from their economy and who do not even come into the job market. That cohort is getting larger as years go by. Great flair, brilliance and intellectual pragmatism in tackling their problems is part of the French psyche, but it may be their tragedy. Every now and then, those who think that they know best are caught out by some awful tragedy that their rational minds could not foresee. I detect those factors coming together again in France to produce—perhaps—a second tragedy for them.

Our approach has been quite different. It is viewed with some suspicion by our continental colleagues, but it is our duty to keep faith with the methods that are working for us so that Europe can look to that torch and see that there is another way; that there is an approach which has worked for one part of western Europe.

Where else does insecurity come from? In this country it used to emerge from inflation, yet the OECD says that Britain's

"new monetary framework is working well"

and has succeeded in

"enhancing the transparency and credibility of monetary policy".

Defeatists in our economic debates used to argue that we had to have an external discipline to make British Governments control inflation because they were incapable of doing it themselves. I have heard hon. Members on both sides of the House argue for European integration measures because we have failed in the past to control inflation and because an external body would, and should, do it for us. That is no longer needed in this country. I hope that the Ken and Eddie show will become part of established procedure. It is transparent and honest and places the issues before the people every time there is a meeting.

Where else does insecurity come from? We argue a great deal in the House about pensions. In funding its pensions, France is actuarially bankrupt. The same goes for Italy. They are funding their current pensions from the taxes raised from their current work force. The stresses are immense. Others, who are not caught in the hurly-burly of our political arguments, recognise that the Brits have been rather clever again. We have built up huge funds—earned, saved, invested and available—that enable people to draw income out of previous earnings. We are no longer a country that has to fund its pensions from current economic activity and taxation.

There is a danger, however. Our pensioners can feel very relaxed compared with some of their continental counterparts, for whom the purchasing power of their pensions has to fall. As night follows day, that will happen.

Mr. Forman: Is there not one group of pensioners, about whom both my hon. Friend and I should still be concerned: the very elderly pensioners who are, say, over 75 years old? They are disproportionately reliant on the state pension, and income support where that is necessary. It is a priority for future public expenditure rounds to try to target some help at that group since, as my hon. Friend has just said, the general group of pensioners in Britain is very well off compared with those in other countries.

Mr. Butcher: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. When I think of that £90 billion social security budget and I listen to my colleagues quite rightly talking about targeting and focusing, that particular category of people comes to mind. If any group needed targeting, it is that one. I have great difficulty believing that we cannot adjust budgets of that size to cater for a dwindling number of people who are probably in greater need than most categories of folk. I hope that colleagues will take note of that comment and consider virement in the context of pensions and the social security budget.

This is the worry: what if we integrated our money into a common currency—or a core currency as I think it was called earlier—and, through majority voting, were unable to prevent the integration of social security systems? As I say it today, it sounds as if it might never happen, but we know from the way in which Europe, the Commission and voting procedures have worked in the past that it is not impossible.

If the social chapter were the background to that scenario, there would be a danger that prudent British pensioners would subsidise, through common mechanisms, the imprudent southern European pension funds and those of France and, say, Belgium. I say again that even to make the point today sounds slightly hysterical, but points made 10 years ago, which sounded equally hysterical, have turned out to demonstrate proven fears of a reality that came to pass. The issue of pensions relates to insecurity and the creation of jobs helps us to ease that. Honesty in our dealings with inflation will improve the security and peace of mind of our people.

I shall briefly raise two more points. I welcome the commitment from the Prime Minister downwards to the eventual abolition of capital gains tax. I happen to co-chair the all-party manufacturing group. Like every all-party group, it agrees, usually, on the objectives it wants—in this case the full health of the manufacturing sector, especially small and medium-sized enterprises—but it rarely agrees on the policy that would achieve that objective.

One of the areas of disagreement concerns the treatment of capital gains tax. We all know the problem. Unquoted companies—small and medium-sized companies—employ, typically, between 20 and 200 people. Their only access to finance is the local clearing bank. They have very little access to real risk capital without a great on-cost. The abolition of capital gains tax would put in place a significant piece of the jigsaw to help the sector of the country's economy which needs it most. What defines manufacturing, as opposed to a service sector activity, is that it is capital intensive, so any measure that releases a flood of capital—which I believe the abolition of capital gains tax would—would have a disproportionate benefit.

That highlights another problem in the House. Historically, the Conservative party is allegedly the party of capital and the Labour party is allegedly the party of labour, although everything is getting rather fudged and, shall we say, muddled at the edges of late, which is not a bad thing in some ways. I wonder whether the House has the wit to agree that the abolition of capital gains tax would cause the biggest job creation programme since 1945.

[Mr. Butcher]

Abolition would have a marked impact on solving the problem for small companies, which are the generators of jobs—the big companies are not since they are shedding labour. If Britain, uniquely in Europe, had no capital gains tax, it would give us a Lee Kuan Yew Singapore-style renaissance in key sectors of our economy. I simply ask the House to consider whether we could break out of our straitjacketed way of thinking. If the Leader of the Opposition decided that he was a Thatcherite to that extent and abolished capital gains tax, he could cause us some real problems—but I do not think that he will abolish it.

There is another contrast between the Conservatives and the Labour party. If we are to be honest, let us consider the information elicited in hostile questioning of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) in the mid to late 1980s when he was a Treasury spokesman. He was talking about the tax take which accrued to the nation as a result of the reduction of the top rates of income tax. Month after month there was persistent interrogation of Treasury Ministers; month after month the reply showed that, as the top rates came down to 60 per cent. and then 40 per cent., not only did the cash take from the top 10 per cent. go up, but the proportion of the total tax paid into the coffers by the top 10 per cent. went up. In other words, supply side economics works.

If those are the facts—and they are—and if the Labour party, behind all the verbiage, is working out a deal to do something for industry and manufacturing, it must know that the lads will not wear it if the top rate of tax remains at its present level. The Labour party will have to jack up the top rate—perhaps to 50 per cent. to start with and then 60 per cent.—and provide a sop for the CBI and other corporate stakeholders, to whom it now wishes to be in thrall, by giving them capital allowances. The odd hints from Dudley, West and elsewhere are that capital allowances will be the concession for the manufacturing sector. It is a double-edged package.

If the tax take goes down as a result of those two measures—which it will, as was shown in the reply given by the hon. Member for Blackburn—where will the Labour party get the extra money? It will have to go back to the same old milch cow, the middle income groups. That really will spell trouble because such a triple whammy will attack and deflate the wealth creating sector.

I had hoped to say something about a core currency, but I shall not. Instead, I shall end by saying that we now have a chance to secure an economic miracle. The problem with economic miracles is that, as in the mid-1980s, they can easily be blown away. We over-egged the pudding and then slammed on the brakes too hard by joining the ERM straitjacket. That is history and we have learnt from it. Now, we have a real opportunity. However, economic miracles are not cataclysmic explosions; they are not dynamic happenings over a short period of time. In fact, they are boring, steady, slow and incremental. We need an incremental lead over our competitors in a variety of factors to achieve an economic miracle. We are now going through just that process.

The Government are being honest and brave. Despite provocation from throughout the House—even from our own colleagues—to go out and do something sexy, dynamic and clever, the Government are taking exactly the right approach and providing the basis for a solid economic renaissance. I commend the Budget as a part of the necessary process and the Government for not trying to be too dynamic and clever when the main chance lies in steady incremental improvement.

7.52 pm

Mr. Barry Legg (Milton Keynes, South-West): Several hon. Members have already expressed concern about the procedures of the House. The right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) made an interesting speech and looked back to the spectre of the 1970s and the formulation of tax legislation. He was concerned that the House was moving towards a nine-to-five four-day week. My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) also said that the procedures of the House needed to be examined.

The procedures that the House has adopted tonight and the way in which political debate is developing in the country show that this place is a disappointing forum for the discussion of United Kingdom economic and financial policies. The age of the soundbite has arrived.

The last time we held an economic debate was at the beginning of December. The soundbite that the Opposition used before the debate was the 10p tax rate, but when it came to the debate they did not want to talk about it. They have taken the same approach today—they floated a soundbite but have come to the House not wanting to talk about it. Last week's soundbite was the stakeholder economy and the Leader of the Opposition went all the way to Singapore to make his comments. He talked about the stakeholder economy in a forum where he would not be questioned. Today, we are holding a major debate on the economy—we are not likely to have another one for six months—but the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer cannot even be bothered to attend and listen to the contributions from his shadow Treasury spokesmen.

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): The hon. Gentleman would do well to observe the courtesies of the House, which are sometimes worth maintaining. My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) accepted a long-standing invitation to address an audience in Wales this evening. As the hon. Gentleman well knows, the business of the House is arranged on a weekly basis. Indeed, one of his hon. Friends has apologised to me as he cannot be here for the whole of the debate because of a prior constituency engagement. The hon. Gentleman may by all means attack us on any perceived political points, but his attack on my hon. Friend has no place in a civilised debate.

Mr. Legg: I am glad to hear, at this stage of the debate, the hon. Gentleman apologising for the absence of his colleague, the shadow Chancellor. I maintain that when there is a major economic debate the whole of the shadow Treasury Front Bench should be here. Instead, we have the politics of the soundbite—the stakeholder economy being enunciated from Singapore.

We do not need to go to Singapore to learn about stakeholder capitalism—it is all in Will Hutton's book, "The state we're in". It contains a whole chapter on stakeholder capitalism. I am gravely disappointed that all the members of the Opposition Front-Bench team have

not come here this afternoon to lay out the measures that the Opposition want in the Budget to deliver what they call stakeholder capitalism.

I want to mention a few of the things that are involved in stakeholder capitalism. First, the Opposition want regional banks set up across the country. They also want regional Parliaments. The chief executives of the regional banks would be selected and appointed by the regional Parliaments. The Opposition want a federal system within the United Kingdom. They want to create stakeholding trade unions. I should be interested to hear from any Labour Member what he thinks should be done to realise the concept of stakeholder trade unions. Will Hutton says that more powers and rights should be given to trade unions to create stakeholder trade unions. That is what it is all about. Have not we heard that somewhere before? It sounds like a return to the 1970s.

What are the other prescriptions for stakeholder capitalism? There is the old canard that not enough finance is available in the UK. Stakeholder capitalism means urging the Bank of England to provide more finance so that businesses can borrow aggressively. That sounds like a return to the inflation of the 1970s. Stakeholder capitalism is about corporatism. Other measures include taking power away from individual shareholders.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): The hon. Gentleman has patronised Yorkshire bank. I hope that that fine regional bank will read his speech tomorrow. He appears to be saying that businesses should not have access to capital on reasonable terms.

Mr. Legg: The hon. Gentleman knows very well that the concept behind stakeholder capitalism is the state providing extra resources to banks to enable them to invest aggressively. That concept rejects free-market economics. It rejects resources being allocated by the free market. Labour wants to take power away from individual shareholders. It believes that company takeovers are wrong and it wants to create a corporate Britain in which only shareholders who are represented on the board have voting rights.

Mr. Jenkin: While listening to my hon. Friend, I am looking at a copy of the speech of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair). The right hon. Gentleman hinted at interference in the natural forces of the market when he said:

> "But it is surely time to assess how we shift the emphasis in corporate ethos from the company being a mere vehicle for the capital market—to be traded, bought and sold as a commodity—towards a vision of the company as a community or partnership in which each employee has a stake and where a company's responsibilities are more clearly delineated."

The right hon. Gentleman did not explain what he meant by that. Unless I am mistaken, pension funds and employee share-ownership already provide that sense of community in a company. What else can he be talking about?

Mr. Legg: As usual, the Leader of the Opposition made a vague statement. Hon Members probably saw the right hon. Gentleman on "Breakfast with Frost" yesterday trying to convince the nation about stakeholder capitalism. "It is only a soundbite. It means nothing at all," he said. "Forget it. It was just my soundbite for last week." Anyone who aspires to Government must understand that they cannot govern by soundbites.

My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary was correct to say that behind the statements of the Leader of the Opposition lies a return to the corporatist 1970s, a return of power to the trade unions and a reduction in the power of ordinary shareholders. That is what stakeholder capitalism is all about.

Mr. Hutton's prescription for that matter is honest. He admits that he would like to see more public spending. Opposition Members would like more public spending on issue after issue, but Opposition Front Benchers fail to admit that that would entail extra taxation. Mr. Hutton is clear that there would need to be extra taxation to finance higher public spending, and he would extend the welfare state because, he believes, the problem of people not wanting to pay higher taxes could be solved by extending universal benefits. The more people have universal benefits, the less resistance there will be to high taxes. That is an honest socialist point of view, and I am sure that we could have a meaningful debate on the subject if Opposition Front Bench Members wanted to engage in such a debate in the Chamber. I would respect them if they honestly put forward a socialist point of view. Instead, all that we get from the Opposition Front Bench is a vacuum.

There has been much debate about Britain's international performance, and Labour focused much attention during our previous debate on economic affairs on the latest report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which suggested—the Opposition claimed—that Britain had been pushed down the league table. Today, we have heard nothing from the Opposition about international comparisons.

In the past few days, a new international study has been released which shows that economic prosperity and success are achieved on the basis of economic freedom and that the most succesful countries are those that make sure that economic freedom exists and expands. That international study ranks Britain sixth behind Hong Kong, New Zealand, Singapore, the United States and Switzerland. International comparisons show that the Government's policies are increasing the prosperity of this country.

Mr. MacShane: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Legg: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman, and I wish to continue.

Mr. MacShane: What is the source of that study?

Mr. Legg: If the hon. Gentleman wants to read more about the international study, I would refer him to last Friday's *Daily Telegraph*. He can get all the details there.

Mr. MacShane: Well, that is alright then.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not continue to intervene from a sedentary position.

Mr. Legg: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. What Labour stands for covertly and overtly is higher public spending, which will lead to higher taxation in one way or another as it always has done in the past.

I am particularly pleased to be able to welcome a Finance Bill that brings into effect measures that will cut taxation. We have had to take action for three years to reduce the deficit, but we are now able to introduce a Finance Bill which proposes lower business taxation,

[Mr. Legg]

lower personal taxation, lower excise duties and improved incentives. I particularly welcome the incentives for improved share participation through savings-related share options and approved profit-sharing schemes.

Many hon Members have commented upon the length of the Bill, and my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) hoped that, although it was long, it would not be an obscure Bill. I hope that he and I will serve on the Finance Bill Committee together, and we shall then see whether this is obscure legislation or not.

Hon. Members may be interested in clause 53. It is said that the British are particularly fond of animals, and it is noteworthy to see that the hard-hearted officials of the Inland Revenue also seem to be fond of animals. Clause 53 deals with the landfill tax, from which there is an exemption where

"the disposal is of material consisting entirely of the remains of dead domestic pets".

So even in the Inland Revenue we find concern for pets and for pet-owners. Typically, that concession for the disposal of dead pets is heavily qualified by a proviso in subsection (5), which reads:

"The test is that during the relevant period—

hon Members will not be surprised to realise that subsequent subsections define the relevant period—

"(a) no landfill disposal was made at the site—

hon Members will be pleased to know that there are subsequent clauses defining site—

"or

(b) the only landfill disposals made at the site were of material consisting entirely of the remains of dead domestic pets."

When studying the landfill legislation, one finds that there are a further five pages of interpretations and a schedule of 25 pages dealing with the administration of the landfill tax. The Committee will certainly have some interesting debates.

My hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher) commented on capital gains tax, and I endorse his comments. We need a thoroughgoing reform of capital gains tax. A system based on a tapering of capital gains tax rates so that only short-term gains were taxed would be beneficial to the economy and raise more revenue. At present, many people and institutions retain shares because there is potentially a high capital gains tax liability if they liquidate those assets. Scope for further tax reform is certainly available to Ministers.

Several hon. Members have commented on the Treasury and Civil Service Committee's report on the Budget which was published today. The Committee broadly supports the Government's taxation and spending policies and believes that the Government have the right fiscal strategy. The Committee was pleased to report that the Government were exercising more effective overhead control, but expressed concerns about the continuing growth of social security. All of us regret that the PSBR is higher than was forecast this time last year, but that is mainly due—as some of my hon. Friends have said—to lower revenues and a lower rate of growth in the economy. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor's forecast for the coming year shows a revival in growth, an objective which most hon. Members hope will be achieved.

The Treasury Select Committee has also been critical of the Bank of England's advice on interest rates and the weight which it has given to certain factors in trying to support an interest rate rise. The Committee was concerned by the Governor's assertion that he was right to seek an interest rate rise in May. We have supported the moves of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor for lower interest rates and we will continue to do so.

I conclude by returning to the subject of stakeholder capitalism and to the views of Mr. Will Hutton. One of Mr. Hutton's concerns about Britain is that there is still a north-south divide. He believes that the interest rate rises in the late 1980s were necessary in the south-east of England, but that they damaged the economy in the north of England. That view is worthy of consideration. If one reads on in Mr. Hutton's book, however, one finds that he is a committed supporter of the ERM. He believes in fixed exchange rates and supports the ultimate objective of a single currency. One may think that that is a strange stance for a man who believes that, even in the United Kingdom, an interest rate may be set for the nation which is appropriate for one part of the country but inappropriate for another part. I think that he has failed to make the connection between what is happening in the real economy and how interest rates should be set.

In the coming year Britain is likely to have a growth rate of around 3 per cent., while Germany—once the miracle economy of Europe—is likely to have a growth rate of only 1 per cent. I shall leave the House with this thought: if there was a single currency and the British economy was growing at 3 per cent. and the Germany economy was growing at 1 per cent., what should the appropriate interest rate be? Should we split the difference so that neither economy had the right interest rate, or should the interest rate be set according to the United Kingdom's or Germany's domestic requirements?

There is no prospect of a single currency being able to benefit an economy without a truly federal system in which financial resources can easily be transferred. Without this a single currency can only harm people and the component economies within the area concerned.

8.12 pm

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg), and I look forward to doing business, as it were, with him in the Committee which considers the Finance Bill. I congratulate him in particular on the early, in-depth reading of the Finance Bill which has enabled him to discover the particular clause which covers the inhumation of pets. As some of Opposition Members' favourite pets are Tory Members of Parliament, we look forward to examining that part of the Bill in some detail.

I was touched by the references made by the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West to Will Hutton, whom I count as a friend and whose book I remember reviewing last year, with some enthusiasm. I must say, however, that when the hon. Gentleman was describing Mr. Hutton's enthusiasm for Europe—not for economic and monetary union, but for the exchange rate mechanism—for a moment I thought that he was describing the short, medium and long-term goals of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, which will lead to private

agonies for the modern Conservative party as it dances on the Titanic in a deadly waltz between fanatical anti-Europeans and those who still see Britain playing a useful part in Europe.

This Budget—which is a serious piece of legislation—has been the most uncommented-on legislation to have been brought before the House since I was first elected a Member of Parliament. That may dismay my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Labour Front Bench, who must of course do doughty battle over the Budget with their opposite numbers. When I return to my constituency, however, and talk to the people of Rotherham—to business people, to people with houses and hopes, to people who look for a good education for their children and for some guarantee of health care, and, in particular, to the older members of the community who have paid national insurance and other contributions for many years, if not decades—I find that none of them have any confidence in either this Budget or in the Government's economic policies. It is easy enough to see why.

The only aspect of the Budget statement which seemed to excite the commitment or interest of Conservative Members was the removal of tax on Bugattis and Bentleys. As the debate proceeded, we suddenly saw that the spin doctors had come into action, and every Conservative Member told us that this was a holding Budget and not real—steady as she goes until the big tax giveaway next year.

The hon. Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher) made a thoughtful and, if I may say so, typical speech as a solid, Birmingham, business-centred, fair to manufacturing, former Minister. I know that because I was the chairman of the local Labour party in Mosely, Birmingham, where he was once a councillor, and where the Chancellor of the Exchequer once lived.

The hon. Member for Coventry, South-West seemed to feel some relief that for the past two or three years there was a sense of economic guidance in the country that was not based on boom or bust and not based on giveaway Budgets, not there simply there to titillate groups of potential Conservative supporters but had some coherence to it. I invite him to join me in the debate on the November Budget next year, if the Government are still in office in 10 months' time. I think he will find that the prudence, honesty and sense of coherence that he discovered in the Budget is thrown to the winds because, whenever the choice comes between party or national advantage, the Conservative party in Government consistently opts for the former. So I was grateful to hear the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-West and I shall read it with extra care if, as certainly I and the country hope that they will not, the Government reach the stage of presenting another Budget later this year.

I am particularly concerned not only about the regressive nature of the Budget—the taxes levied weigh most heavily on the poorer members of the community—but about its lack of excitement. It does not seek to grapple with the new challenges that a global economy presents. These challenges can be dealt with in many different ways. We see in the United States from the Republicans and from Mr. Newt Gingrich when he is taking time off from padding his own coffers with election expenses, a novel and challenging approach to national finances. I happen not to agree with it, but at least one may argue that it has a certain coherence.

Let us consider other economies throughout the world. Let us take as an example, as it was cited by the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West, the country where my right hon. Friend the leader of the Labour party recently gave a speech—Singapore. It has a novel approach to public finance. A compulsory 25 per cent. is deducted from all employees' salaries and a compulsory 15 per cent.—nearly twice the percentage deducted in the United Kingdom—is deducted from every employer's payroll, to pay for a national health, pension and housing scheme.

Only my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) sits on the Front Bench as I speak. Were his senior colleagues on the Front Bench to stand at that Dispatch Box and say, "Here is Labour's policy. In addition to income tax, 25 per cent. will be taken off people's income to pay for national health and pensions and 15 per cent. off every employer", the Conservative Benches would be in uproar, with cries of "Socialism! Communism!"

I can imagine the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West delving into back numbers of *The Daily Telegraph* to describe such a system, yet such is the way in which things are done in Singapore—not in a socialist state, not a communist state, not in the United States of America, but a massive 25 per cent. deduction from all employees' pay in Singapore. Had the Budget offered that as a proposal, one might have been interested.

I do not know, with the new configuration of the Government Front Bench team, exactly which of the two wings of the Conservative party all the Ministers come from. Let us say that the guiding spirit was that of the Chancellor, who I am happy to recognise as someone who believes that Britain should be part of Europe, unlike his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

Let us suppose that the European example had been followed—that of Germany. For all its current faults, I wish that British short-term interest rates were as low as those of Germany. I wish that our country had giant car-producing companies that belonged to British firms. I wish that we had regions of our country, such as the Germans have in the new Bundeslaender, where state of the art factories are being created with many fewer workers than previously, with high technology investment, in a way that we do not dream of in Britain as we proclaim our pride in taking the cast-off screwdriver assembly plants from Taiwan and Korea.

I acknowledge that there are some temporary difficulties in that immense economic drive forward, but I am prepared to take a bet with any hon. Member that when I leave the House or die, whichever is the sooner, the per capita gross domestic product of Germany will be greater than that of this country. I am ashamed of that fact.

If the Budget had embraced Mr. Hutton's stakeholder economy ideas, that would have had something to commend itself, but it is a Budget shorn of ideas, with no sense of direction—a Budget that treads water, that marks time.

Even Samuel Brittan—I have been a devoted reader of Mr. Brittan for many decades but he is not, it is safe to say, regarded as a socialist, social democrat or stakeholding commentator—asks in today's *Financial Times* whether we might consider hypothecation, at least for the national health service, arguing that the time has come for fresh consideration of the way in which we raise taxes.

[Mr. Denis MacShane]

I find that intellectual emptiness, that vacuous hollowness, at the heart of the Budget, a reflection of the emptiness at the heart of the present Government. The hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin), whose contributions to our financial debates we all enjoy, may agree that, at the time when his father was in the Cabinet and the former right hon. Member for Blaby was Chancellor, there was some vim and viz of excitement to fiscal policy in this country.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): The poll tax.

Mr. MacShane: No; that was the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker).

Mr. Stevenson: Was it?

Mr. MacShane: Mr. Lawson, it must be said, fought tooth and nail against the poll tax. The then Chancellor of the Exchequer recognised the poll tax for the stupidity that it was, but, with the typical courage of a Conservative Minister, he did what he was told.

That is the challenge for the nation. To a certain extent, that challenge has been met by Labour Front Bench Members, especially by the proposal, which I found exciting, by my hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor to reduce the basic rate of income tax to 10p in the pound, and the concept of the windfall levy on the disgraceful, scandalous and affronting profits that utility companies have made. Those are two modest suggestions, yet in them ideas were at work, but ideas there are none in the Budget.

Mr. Legg: The hon. Gentleman has praised Labour Front Bench Members' idea of introducing a 10p tax rate. Will he try to persuade them to table an amendment of that sort?

Mr. MacShane: I do not know whether that will be possible in Committee, but I will gladly take technical advice on it. If the right hon. Gentleman—I am sorry, the hon. Gentleman, but I wait in hope—tonight pledges that he will vote with me across the Floor of the Committee on such a proposal, and on other proposals to make the Finance Bill more coherent and sensible, I hope that we can do business together. I look forward to meeting him in the Lobby after this debate.

The core questions that any Government economic statement and taxation policy must ask for our country are not those asked in stories in *The Daily Telegraph*, but those that arise from independent international assessments. Why have we fallen from 13th to 18th in the per capita GDP league, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development? Why is our country's trade at its lowest this century? Why are we now 21st in the international league for investment? Why, for every pound of inward investment into the country, does £2.50 leave Britain?

Why are we now 35th in the world education league? Why, in one in five of our working-age households, does no one earn a wage? Why are a million fewer people in work now than were in work when the present Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), became Prime Minister? Why are one in three of our children deemed to be living in poverty compared with one in 10 in 1979?

We cannot walk 100 yd or, if the anti-Europeans prefer it, 100 m from this place, without stumbling across beggars. That is the real tribute to the economic and fiscal policy of the Government. Why have we had, in spite of that, the biggest tax increases during peacetime in our 20th century history?

Why is a typical family in Rotherham paying £600 a year more in tax than it did in 1992? Why have more homes been repossessed under the Conservatives? Why are more people suffering from negative equity—waking up each morning in their house knowing that they cannot sell it? Mrs. Thatcher made a fundamental promise—everyone should own their own home, which would give them a stake in the economy, but that stake has turned out to be a burden on them.

Why is this country more divided than ever before in its history? People repeatedly quote Disraeli's "Sybil" and the two nations that know nothing of each other and have no intercourse with each other. That is what the 16—nearly 17—years of Conservative Government have done to Britain. At the heart of that process has been economic policy; the Budget—the tax system—is the motor, structure or plan that defines a country. It is the social contract between the haves and the have-nots, between the rich and the poor, and between the old and the young. That social contract has been betrayed, corrupted and destroyed by a Government who care for nothing except their own survival.

8.30 pm

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): Despite the exaggerations and the curmudgeonly comments of the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane), I believe that we have had a civilised and interesting debate on the Finance Bill. One or two of my hon. Friends have mentioned the fact—without making any criticism—that it was a pity that more hon. Members, from all parties, had not been present in the Chamber. They said that, now we have television monitors in our rooms, it is much easier for colleagues to see what is going on, which is certainly true. But it is a pity that a wider audience outside the House should not have been able to hear the interesting contributions that have been made to our debate. People seem to think that two 15-minute slots each week are all that Parliament is about—there is a lot more to our proceedings than that, as the contributions to our debate have proved.

Despite the comments of the hon. Member for Rotherham—of course, we all make party political points as best we can—I believe that we have had a good Budget, which has now become the Finance Bill. The Budget has been much more widely welcomed in the country than either the Opposition or the so-called responsible press would have us believe.

We are debating the Finance Bill against a background of economic success and strength that no one on either side of the Chamber would have been able to forecast, even as recently as the last general election. If we had told our constituents that, by 1996, mortgage rates would be the lowest for 30 years, and inflation and the basic rate of tax would be the lowest for 50 years, we would not have been believed.

Despite the gloomy statistics given by the hon. Member for Rotherham, I believe that this country's economy is strong, and that we are entitled to say to my right hon.

and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, "Well done, you have achieved that. You have been patient and steady, and now you deserve our thanks."

However, it is a fragile success, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor must be cautious about imposing unnecessary burdens on business because, although the economy is strengthening and business is undoubtedly confident, that confidence is fragile. We should be hesitant about penalising industry and business, particularly small business. The growth rate in the economy is almost certainly less than my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor had hoped for or would wish. That is understandable—all Chancellors want greater success than they have managed to achieve—but I do not resile from my earlier comment that he deserves our praise and thanks. We must be careful that we do not harm business and industry.

The reason why I preface my speech in this way is that my task in contributing to the debate is to make a straightforward constituency point about landfill tax and its implications for British Sugar, which operates in my constituency. It also operates in another eight major sites throughout the country, so I am presumably making the point on behalf of hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber.

Some 8 million to 9 million tonnes of sugar beet are delivered annually to those nine factories for processing. By definition, the sugar beet attracts fresh, uncontaminated soil. It is estimated that between half a million and 1 million tonnes of soil is attracted to that beet in the course of an annual operation. On-farm improvements have been made over the years, and we now have the lowest proportion of soil ever adhering to the beet, but that residual amount exists, and the Finance Bill creates a problem for British Sugar.

At present, the topsoil is conditioned and sold for a variety of uses, such as horticulture, recreational amenities and the improvement of agricultural land, but not all the soil can be used in that way. Avenues such as I have described have, of necessity, had to be found, because the topsoil cannot be returned to the farms whence the beet originated. That is due to the need to control rhizomania—the soil-borne root disease which my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury will know well—and the agreed pest control policy. The Ministry of Agriculture and the industry have agreed that the soil can no longer be returned to the beet-growing farms.

I therefore make a straightforward point. Until the markets that I have mentioned have been fully developed, more than half a million tonnes of soil—approximately—still has to go to British Sugar's nine landfill sites. Obviously, British Sugar is as effective and efficient as it can be, but the tax will increase its costs and hamper its efficiency. I have been told that the costs will be between £500,000 and £1 million annually if the Bill is enacted as drafted.

I therefore urge, for one or two simple reasons, that British Sugar should be excluded from the proposed tax. The soil is uncontaminated. It is merely fresh soil which has been removed from beet, and it is being returned to soil. It is not waste. If it were returned to the farm of origin, there could be no question of it being labelled as waste, and no question of it being taxed. The present practice is a plant hygiene measure for the control of a disease, not an industrial practice that produces waste which requires disposal.

There must be something wrong with the proposed legislation if it gives rise to a taxable event when soil is placed in a landfill site owned and operated by the processor, and no public facility is used. That cannot have been the intention of the draftsman, and I look forward to hearing in the Minister's reply to the debate, or elsewhere, that it is not the intention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor. If am correct, I hope that those concerns will be heard, and that a suitable amendment to the Bill will be accepted in Committee.

8.40 pm

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): I am sorry that I was unable to hear many of the speeches in the debate, particularly the opening speeches, because the planes were delayed by fog, but I got here just in time to hear the speech by the right hon. Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt). It was a significant speech that told us a great deal about the state of the Conservative party, if not a great deal about the economy.

The right hon. Gentleman was attempting to address the great internal battle within the Conservative party between the one-nation group and the other group, whatever they call themselves. His whole concern was really to reply to Baroness Thatcher's speech last week, and to score a point in that internal debate. That encapsulates the problem facing the country at the moment. Everything the Government do is driven by internal divisions within the Conservative party, and that is why they cannot address the real problems facing the country.

It was also interesting to hear what the right hon. Gentleman said about the Finance Bill. He attempted to put a one-nation slant on that and claim that it was a one-nation Finance Bill. It would be easy to demolish that argument.

One of the main features of the Finance Bill is that it is highly regressive. That is obvious when we consider its effect on different income levels. The Institute of Fiscal Studies has already done that. One of the appendices of the Select Committee report clearly shows how each income decile of the population is affected by the Budget measures in the Finance Bill. How does it affect the unemployed, for example? According to the Institute of Fiscal Studies, the income of those in the bottom two deciles will be reduced.

There are no measures in the Finance Bill to help the unemployed. The hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) said that my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) made a vacuous speech, but he presented policies to address unemployment. One of those key policies is mentioned in the Opposition amendment, which proposes a windfall tax to deal with the problem of youth unemployment.

The Conservative party derides windfall taxes, but Lord Howe, a previous Chancellor who has been involved in the internal debates within the Conservative party, advocated one on the banks in 1981, so there is no reason why the Conservative party should not support a windfall tax. What better purpose for a windfall tax could there be than dealing with unemployment? The Budget contains

[Mr. Malcolm Chisholm]

no other measures to help the unemployed. The Government may claim that there will be more investment as a result of the Finance Bill, but it contains no measures to improve investment and deal with unemployment.

Nor does it help the low-paid. According to the tables produced by the Institute of Fiscal Studies, those in the first two deciles lose, those in the third decile gain by 5p a week, and those in the fourth decile gain by 35p a week as a result of the Budget. That is after all the punishment suffered by those sections of the population through increases in indirect taxes, such as VAT on fuel and increases in income tax.

Since 1992, low earners have been punished by many increases in income tax. Let us consider the position of a man on half average earnings. The proportion of his income that is paid in tax has increased by 33 per cent. since 1992, and now, according to the Institute of Fiscal Studies, he will gain only 35p a week. The widening of the 20p band helps no one earning under £7,000 a year. That is why the suggestion by the Labour party to introduce a 10p band starts to deal with the problem of those on very low pay, as do other measures that we propose, such as a minimum wage. There is nothing for those on low incomes in the Budget.

The middle income earners whom the Conservative party hopes to win back are not helped much, either. On average, the typical family has lost £800 since the last election. The Finance Bill may enable those families to recover about £130. That is why it was called the "7p up, 1p down" Budget.

The great mass of those on middle incomes have been punished since the election and throughout the period of Conservative Government. One of the great myths is that the Conservative party reduced the tax burden on those people, but it is clear from the total tax burden and the proportion of income that relates to tax and national insurance contributions that middle income earners are also paying more under the present Government.

It is important that we should not isolate the basic rate of tax. Of course, that is what the Government try to do. In the advert in the *Sunday Times* on the last day of last year, which set out all the supposedly wonderful achievements of the Government, the Prime Minister pointed to the basic rate of income tax, but there are many other ways of increasing income tax apart from raising the basic rate.

Since the general election, the married couple's allowance has been reduced, as has mortgage tax relief. Personal allowances were frozen twice in 1993, and the unfreezing now does not make up for that. The increase in national insurance contributions is the same as an increase in income tax from the point of view of the taxpayer. The great majority of middle income earners gain very little from the Budget. Only those at the top of the income scale gain anything significant. The Bill is highly regressive on income tax. Those higher up the income scale retain a bigger proportion of their earnings.

The Finance Bill also starts the process of getting rid of inheritance tax, which is still a Government objective. As I asked in the Budget debate, how can the Conservative party seriously say that it is better to spend £285 million a year on raising the inheritance tax threshold way beyond the reach of inflation than to spend that money on reducing VAT on home heating, although a little more expenditure would be necessary to get that down to 5 per cent.?

The Minister has sent someone to check my figure of £285 million. I agree that it is slightly puzzling, because the Budget press release gave lower figures for the cost of inheritance tax next year, but the full year cost of that change is £285 million. I am told that the reason for the discrepancy between the two figures is that the tax is not collected until six months into the year. If there is a technical explanation, no doubt the Minister can give it, but how can that money possibly be justified in such a tight Budget situation?

The hon. Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher) would like to get rid of capital gains tax, which is another Government objective. Those are the Government's priorities and they illustrate more than anything else the cruel and regressive nature of their tax regime.

Of course, it is not only the regressive nature of the Finance Bill that is significant; the other obvious fact is that the tax reduction is very small compared with the tax rises since the last election. That is because the economy has not improved to an extent that would allow genuine tax reductions. The £3 billion in tax reductions—it is not as much as we were led to believe—was achieved through cutting public expenditure; not one small tax reduction is due to the success of the economy.

The key problems in the Finance Bill are the high levels of borrowing and the low levels of growth. It is significant that, in the 14 economic points that the Prime Minister put to the nation in *The Sunday Times* on 31 December, he did not mention growth. How could he, when we have now plummeted to the second lowest level in the European Union? That is slightly better than our position since 1979, over which period we have been the lowest, but that is not something for the Government to boast about.

The relatively high growth record was a very transitory phenomenon and all predictions for next year are way below the 3 per cent. that the Chancellor has talked about. The Treasury Select Committee has thrown doubt on that figure, Goldman Sachs has said that it will be 1.75 per cent., Professor Minford has said 2 per cent., and others have said that it might be 2.5 per cent. All the growth predictions show a declining trend. The growth target has not been achieved, which is why revenue is in trouble this year and why that trend will continue next year.

There are other factors at work, to which the Treasury Select Committee refers in its report. I have had time only to flick through the report, in which the Committee addresses other questions. The disappointing growth figures do not account for all the shortfall in revenue, and there are other factors at work which we must investigate closely. For example, income tax revenue is much less than was expected. It is suspected that that is because people many in work are in low-paid and casual jobs. They are not paid high wages, and therefore cannot contribute to income tax. The Government must be aware of that.

Value added tax receipts are also down. Income tax has decreased by £4 billion-plus, and VAT is down by £5 billion-plus, on the Government's predictions. That is related to the very poor performance of consumer

spending in the past year—which is not surprising when we consider the job insecurity and the low rates of pay that are endemic in our economy.

The Prime Minister did not focus on growth and borrowing; instead, he tried to present what he regarded as the successful features of the economy. Next year, we shall see the Government adopt two basic strategies—if Government Members can stop squabbling among themselves long enough to carry them out. The first will be to reduce the basic rate of income tax by some method, irrespective of whether it is in the economic interests of the country. That must be achieved, and the Government hope that people will be deceived by a reduction in the basic rate of income tax and forget the rise in national insurance contributions and other allowance changes that have taken place. That is one strategy.

Another strategy will involve the presentation of very selective economic facts as exemplified by *The Sunday Times* advertisement. They will be quarter truths or, in many cases, 1 per cent. truths. For example, the Prime Minister stated that Britain has the lowest unemployment of any major European country. In saying that, he insulted Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Portugal, Switzerland, Austria and the Netherlands, to name but a few. All those countries have lower unemployment than Britain, but obviously the Prime Minister does not regard them as major European countries.

There is another example of the kind of selective presentation we shall see from the Government. In the advertisement I mentioned, the Prime Minister referred to how Britain exports more cars and televisions than any other European country. I have not checked that; I hope it is true. However, we know about Britain's general trade performance.

To be charitable to the Prime Minister, the figures showing the plummet in British exports of about £1 billion between October and November were not released at that stage, but we knew that we had the biggest trade deficit in three years, and we knew that our share of world trade was at its lowest ever level. It has declined steadily since the Government came to power.

Finally, the Prime Minister boasted about inward investment. My hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) said that inward investment is falling, and that it is still less than outward investment. However, the level of inward investment has not been too bad—thank goodness we have had some investment.

Of course, the Prime Minister failed to mention the dismal failure of investment in the economy as a whole. It is only 1 per cent. this year, in spite of the Government's prediction last year of 6 per cent. That is in line with what has happened for the past 17 years, and we are 22nd out of the 24 OECD countries in terms of investment. That is the underlying problem upon which all the other problems of low growth and poor public finances are based. Unless the Government address the investment problem in the way that the Labour party is prepared to do, there will be no solution to the economic problems confronting this country.

It is interesting that the hon. Member for Coventry, South-West said that he wants to get rid of capital gains tax. Would it not be far more constructive and creative to use capital gains tax to encourage investment, so that those who have held shares in a company for a long time have a low rate of capital gains tax, while those who sold their shares quickly have a high tax rate? Let us use the tax system to encourage investment. An increase in first-year capital allowances is another obvious way of doing that.

The Finance Bill meets the needs of very few people in this country, and it certainly does not address Britain's underlying economic problems. We shall want to examine many details in Committee. There are a few welcome developments. The change in executive share options obviously resulted from the Labour party's campaign and the proposed new clause that we tabled last year. We hope that the Government will also adopt some of the proposed new clauses and amendments that we have tabled this year.

The economy is clearly the key battleground in the run-up to the election. We know what to expect, and our main task is to tell the people of this country the truth about the economic situation. However, at the end of the day they will know the truth, because they know what has happened to their standard of living since the last election. They know that their standard of living declined in real terms for the whole second half of last year. Therefore, it will be much easier for Labour Members to put across our economic arguments, because our analysis and our explanations chime with people's experiences.

I look forward to the debates on the Finance Bill, and will listen with interest to the Minister when he replies.

8.57 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): It is, perhaps, hard to remind ourselves that in this debate we are engaged in the most important function of the House of Commons. We are, through the Bill, providing the Government with their supply. We are voting to raise the revenue that the Government will dispense in the coming 12 months, starting on 6 April.

It is, if I may echo the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander), who is not in his place, a rather sad testament of the times that the debate has been rather sparsely attended. I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to other right hon. and hon. Members, for not being present for all of the debate. I heard the opening speeches but will not pretend that I was watching it on the monitor. When we hear people say, "I wasn't in the Chamber, but I was watching it on the monitor," I fear that there is a half-truth in what they are saying, and that people are not paying enough heed to the exchanges in the Chamber.

On such an important Bill, I share the sentiments of my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg), whose constituency is not pronounced the same way as Keynes, the economist, and we should remember that.

Mr. Darling: But Milton as in Friedman.

Mr. Jenkin: Milton as in Friedman, certainly. That is an accolade that my hon. Friend would accept.

The importance of the debate should not be underestimated, and it is sad that more hon. Members are not here. Perhaps one reason why so few attend is the sort of speech that we have just heard from the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm). He apologised for arriving late for the debate and said that it was because he was stuck in the fog, but his arguments, logic and policies are still stuck in the fog.

[Mr. Jenkin]

As we enter the pre-election period and begin to hear more, apparently, from Her Majesty's official Opposition—we heard the clarion call for a so-called "stakeholder economy" from Singapore, from the Leader of the Opposition—it has been a great disappointment that we heard nothing at all from the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) when he was questioned on specific items of economic policy. When asked whether he thought that the level of Government expenditure was about right, too high or too low, he answered with a slogan. When asked about recent moves in interest rates—whether they were appropriate—he had no view whatever. In fact, he said that the Labour party would have, if I am quoting him correctly, lower long-term interest rates than the Conservative party has achieved in office. That is like saying that we will organise that there will be no droughts.

The only way in which one can organise lower long-term interest rates is to practise the art and mystery of economic management day in and day out; to know what level of public expenditure will be appropriate; to know what the proportion of national income should be set at to run the economy; and to set out the objectives, because the markets, which govern so much of what we do in the modern world, look to the people who make the decisions, and look for credibility. The debate is about nothing if it is not about maintaining the credibility of the Government's overall stance in the international markets.

Opposition Front Benchers have exposed the fact that they have no thoughts at all. I congratulate them. They are becoming past masters at the process of opposition, where one must say as little as possible that could ever be hostage to fortune at some time during the election campaign. They know that what they are promising by gesture day in and day out are substantial increases in public expenditure, but any hint of figures is excised from the utterances of Opposition Front Benchers, so that it is harder for us to pin anything on them, as we have in the past. But they are not likely to escape when we come to the crunch.

Mr. Bayley: It is a question of credibility. The proportion of our GDP that was taken in tax last year by the Conservative Government was higher than that taken by the previous Labour Government. Does the hon. Gentleman think that the proportion of GDP that is taken by the Conservatives in tax is too high, too low or about right?

Mr. Jenkin: That is an easy question. It is too high.

Mr. Bayley: Why did the Conservatives raise it, then?

Mr. Jenkin: Now we have another policy from the Opposition—when the country goes into recession, rather than allowing borrowing and increased taxation to continue to support the level of public services, the Opposition would cut. They have a good record of cutting public expenditure. They cut the health service in the 1970s when they lost control of the economy, and they cut the old age pension by changing the uprating system. That is the kind of mess that we can expect the Labour party to get us into again. When we study what the party has actually said, we find that it has not changed.

Mr. Bayley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jenkin: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman again.

Mr. Bayley: The hon. Gentleman is most kind.

The hon. Gentleman argues that the proportion of gross domestic product taken in tax is higher under the Conservatives than it was under the last Labour Government because we have just gone through a recession, but the proportion has been higher under the Conservatives for 15 of the 16 years during which they have been in office. Surely the hon. Gentleman is not arguing that the economy was in recession under the Conservatives for all those years.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman is leading himself up a cul de sac. The Conservatives are looking at other economies—such as that of Singapore—whose public expenditure as a proportion of the national income is substantially lower than ours, while their growth rate is substantially higher. If we look around the world for examples of economies that are run better than ours, we must take account not only of the slogans but of the real facts. If we want to engender a higher growth rate in the years ahead so that our economy ceases to decline in relation to others throughout the world, we must emulate the faster growing economies in as many ways as we can.

Mr. MacShane: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jenkin: I shall come to the hon. Gentleman in a minute.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) wanted to raise extra taxation, supposedly to help the unemployed. There is no evidence that extra spending and taxation either make a Government popular or help the unemployed in the long term. The hon. Gentleman denigrated the Government's objectives to remove inheritance and capital gains tax. Let me ask him a question. If it could be demonstrated that a Government could create a framework in which more jobs were created, more investment attracted and more output and growth generated through the abolition of those taxes, would such action be wrong? Or is the Labour party—as the hon. Gentleman suggested—so trapped in the ideology of equality that it would continue to apply policies that apply equality come what may, however damaging such taxes may be to the overall growth rate of the economy?

How much capital gains tax does Singapore levy? I asked that question on a recent visit. Singapore starts to apply capital gains tax when individual gains reach several million Singapore dollars, at a rate of 3 per cent. Next time the Leader of the Opposition visits Singapore, perhaps he should examine its taxation system. That system is something to emulate—as well as the enormous corporate control that exists there, to which I shall refer later. *[Interruption.]* I shall deal with the speech of the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) in a minute. It was more interesting than he might have imagined.

The real test of the Government, and of the conduct of the Opposition, is fitness to govern. The absence of clear answers from the hon. Member for Oxford, East—whom I am pleased to see in his place—demonstrates that the Labour party is simply not fit to govern. The real message from the Second Reading of the Bill, which I can send to my constituents as we enter the pre-election phase, is that we have set taxation on a downward trend again. That is what voters want. It is not simply an electoral bribe; it is necessary to improve incentives and the operation of the economy.

It is not possible for increased Government expenditure and increased taxation to accelerate the wealth-creating process. Examples from all around the world prove that

the less the Government suck out of the wealth-creating economy and put into non-wealth-creating activities, the more that can be left to fructify in the pockets of the people—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry that the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) is not familiar with the sayings of Winston Churchill. As I was saying, the more that can be left to fructify in the pockets of the people, the more active and dynamic the economy will be.

Perhaps the most depressing aspect of the conduct of the Government's economic policy over the past 17 years—I accept the mild admonition of the hon. Member for York—is our failure more effectively to reduce the share of national income taken up by Government spending. The reason why we increased it—*[Interruption.]* I am drawing the hon. Gentleman's attention to the most depressing figure in this year's Red Book.

If we are to create a dynamic economy, there is one big problem that we must tackle. The biggest increase in our spending programme, despite all that we are attempting to do to reform it, is in the social security budget, as shown on page 141 of the Red Book. The Red Book shows £1.2 billion added to the plans for next year as compared to the plans drawn up for this year; another £1 billion is planned for the following year and another £550 million for the year after that.

Do we need more proof of the fact that the Labour party is not fit to govern? Goodness knows what the figures would show had we not tackled the growth in social security spending. We have managed to flatten the upward trend in social security spending. Social security spending is now growing at a rate below that of economic growth whereas it was growing substantially faster.

The Labour party, however, has opposed every measure that Ministers have put to the House to bring social security spending under control. It is at it now. It still thinks that bogus asylum seekers—people who have been in this country on different pretexts for considerable periods and who are seeking to avoid deportation by making bogus asylum claims—should have a prior claim on the resources of the welfare state, before the taxpayers. The Labour party is demonstrating its irresponsibility and unfitness to govern.

We need to achieve a steadily falling rate of spending and a steadily falling rate of taxation as a proportion of national income, and we also need greater incentives to encourage people to save. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) who talked about restructuring savings incentives in the tax system. I believe that incentives for saving are too dispersed. We encourage people to save in too many different types of pension, in personal equity plans and TESSAs, for varying terms. That means that too much of taxpayers' money—ordinary people's money—is sucked into savings mechanisms that are too impersonal. Corporate and collective pension schemes do not give people the same sense of ownership as personal pension schemes. The national insurance system is, of course, not a savings scheme at all; it is simply a way of buying a Government promise on a wing and a prayer, a promise that might be delivered some time in the future.

A stakeholder economy is not a slogan to be lifted from the far east. As my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West said, the stakeholding economy described by the Opposition is more of a stateholding economy which will result in the state promoting its own vested interests instead of giving individuals and families a genuine stake in society. What we really want is the property-owning, share-owning and capital-owning democracy that the Conservatives have been promoting for some time.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West, I have been delving in the pages of *The Daily Telegraph*, and I am reminded of an article written by the late Lord Joseph, which was published only on Friday although it was written shortly before he died in 1994. When I heard the Leader of the Opposition talk about a stakeholding economy, I thought that he might mean giving everyone more choices and more incentives to save, because we need to encourage people to do that at the same time as we reduce the burden of taxation. Lord Joseph made an important point in his article:

"Welfare is now by far our biggest industry. It is mostly of benefit to the middle classes. It is they who staff it, and enjoy a large proportion of its avalanche of salaries and pensions. Mitigating poverty is not what it achieves. It makes serfs of too many of its recipients."

If we are to introduce proper savings in place of the bogus savings scheme called national insurance that we now have, they must be a substitute. We do not want additional compulsory pensions loaded on top of all the social security costs, as is proposed by the Labour party.

I also commend this comment of Lord Joseph's to my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench:

"My own favourite strategy to give every home a stake in the economy"—

this was written in 1994, not in the aftermath of the publicity foray by the Leader of the Opposition—

"is to allow friendly societies to recover much of the role they have relinquished over this century."

I also commend a report, published by the Adam Smith Institute in December, called "The Fortune Account". It proposes to give all citizens a personal savings account to fund their pensions and long-term care and perhaps, as the scheme develops, meet other needs. This proposal is inspired by Singapore and Chile and would create the savings environment that has encouraged the tiger economies to grow as much as they have.

The objective of the Finance Bill is to create the right climate for continued investment, continued growth and continued economic success. Our objective must be gradually to change the behaviour of the British economy so that it behaves more like the tiger economies, and to increase the growth rate. I commend the Bill to the House.

9.17 pm

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): I shall not follow the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) too far. Although he missed the debate, he said how terrible it was. He did an injustice to hon. Members on both sides of the House. Relatively few spoke, but their speeches were quite interesting. This has been the most interesting economic debate we have had for some time, perhaps because hon. Members have had to talk about wider matters than the Finance Bill, which can be dry stuff.

At least the hon. Member for Colchester, North was better than the nationalists, of whom there was neither sight nor sound during the entire debate. That is surprising, because it might have been thought that the conduct of economic policy would be of interest to them.

[Mr. Alistair Darling]

The Chief Secretary has made something of a tradition of opening all economic debates with some knockabout stuff. He now seems to be introducing a tradition of making unfounded allegations against my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo), from which he then departs under cross-examination.

Not surprisingly, the Chief Secretary attacked high taxation, high borrowing and high spending, as well he might. The Government have imposed high taxation because of economic failure. They have imposed 21 tax increases—the equivalent of 7p in the pound in income tax—and record levels of borrowing because of economic failure. The Treasury Committee report, published today, drew attention to the fact that the Government's targets for the public sector borrowing requirement are slipping yet again.

The Government are also a Government of high spending. The hon. Member for Colchester, North was critical of that. The share of spending has not changed very much in the past 16 years. When Conservative Members ask us what is the right spending figure, they might reflect on that fact.

Of course the amount of money that a Government spend is important, and public spending must be kept under tight control, but equally important is what the money is spent on. As many hon. Members have said, Singapore and the far east appear to be the places to be for hon. Members on both sides of the House. What is interesting about the Asian economies is their high level of intensive investment and specific investment in education as opposed to high levels of spending caused by the dead weight of unemployment, which is so damaging socially and economically.

The Chief Secretary lauded the Government's success, but he might have referred more to the Treasury Committee's report. I have already mentioned that that Select Committee, which is Tory controlled after all, was critical about the fact that the Government's target on PSBR appears to slip each and every year. We are now told that the PSBR is not forecast to go into surplus until 2000. I suspect that, next year, the figure will be revised again.

Many of us remember Lord Lawson's speech when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1988. He told us that the economy was in excellent shape and that we were on the verge of going into a new economic era, in which the country would enjoy unparalleled success. Today, all those years later, after the deepest recession since the second world war, we are still being told that the Government's conduct of economic policy is such that we are on the verge of the breakthrough that has eluded the country for many, many years.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) said, doubts have been expressed about the growth rate that the Chancellor has claimed; he has set an ambitious growth rate that many commentators do not agree with him about.

No doubt the Chief Secretary had a hand in drafting the advertisement which appeared in *The Mail on Sunday* and, perhaps, other newspapers on the last day of last year which was signed by the Prime Minister himself. It asked:

"Which country . . . has the lowest mortgage rate for 30 years"?

The right hon. Gentleman might have added which country has had some of the highest mortgage rates for many of the 16 years in which the Conservatives have held office. The hon. Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander) asked what our constituents would have thought if we had told them that they would be paying low mortgage rates just now, but he might also ask himself what his constituents would have said had he told them in 1992 that, rather than tax cuts year on year, tax rises would be imposed the like of which have never been seen in peacetime Britain.

The advertisement also posed the question:

"Which country . . . has the lowest unemployment of any major European country"?

That ignores the fact that one in five non-pensioner households now has someone who is not working. That is something that we should all reflect on, given the damage it is doing to our country's fabric economically and socially.

The advertisement also boasted about the country having the longest period of low inflation, but we have also had high inflation at times during the past 16 years. It said that the Government had invested more in pensions. It is funny that it did not mention the mis-selling of pensions that was exposed two years ago. Many people were led to believe that the very act of going private and opting out would be enriching. We know that many people lost money as a result. The Government must bear some responsibility for that because they created the climate in which that mis-selling was made possible.

The Chief Secretary attacked us, as he is quite entitled to do, and I am happy to deal with those attacks. He might like to reflect on the fact that, in the late 1970s, Lord Howe, who was then shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, said only two things: that the then Government taxed too much and borrowed too much. The Chief Secretary might like reflect on the fact that, a generation later, the present Conservative Government are taxing too much and borrowing too much, because, after 16 years of economic failure, we are in the same position as we were in the late 1970s. The country is subject to high levels of taxation, and the Government have piled on taxes year on year since the election in 1992. They are spending broadly the same amount as was spent in 1979. When Conservative Members ask us for the right spending figures, they should look at their own record because that is what the voters will do at the next election.

Mr. Forman: The hon. Gentleman seeks to direct some ridicule at my noble Friend Lord Howe for the brevity of his comment about the then Labour Government, but does the hon. Gentleman realise that that statement had a clarity and a lack of ambiguity that are worlds away from the Opposition Front-Bench team, which cannot and will not say anything?

Mr. Darling: I am bound to admit that the themes are short. What I am saying is that, after 16 years, if Lord Howe were sitting on this side of the Chamber, he might just as well be saying the same things. People will judge the Government on their record and not on what they said then or what they are saying now.

There have been a number of common themes. One was on the need to simplify tax legislation. Again, I think that that will be an annual event. My right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) made that point. This,

I suppose, is the first Finance Bill that is part of the private finance initiative. There are some privatised clauses in it, although I have not been able to spot all of them yet. I look forward to the annual report that we shall receive on how to simplify the tax system, which is the result of the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) last year.

The second common theme, which arose time and again and struck Labour Members, was the Conservative party's internal divisions, which are now spilling out on to the Floor of the House. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury said that there were no internal divisions and that the Tory party was united, but, in the first speech from the Back Benches, his former Cabinet colleague, the right hon. Member for Wirral, West (M. Hunt), said unashamedly that he was a one-nation Conservative. He nailed his colours to the mast, as did the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) and the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies).

The news clearly got out because, by the end of the debate, the right-wing had fought back, as we heard from the hon. Member for Colchester, North. The internal divisions were there for all to see.

Mr. Jenkin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Darling: Not just now.

The right hon. Member for Wirral, West has a difficulty. He quoted Disraeli's "Sybil" and believes that he is a one-nation Conservative—and I think that we are all aware of his record—but he has now left Government. The hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding—and I hope that I do not offend him—will probably not be included in the Government, at least in this generation, and the right hon. Member for Worthing is, I think, leaving the House. The new, dominant generation of the Conservative party is unashamedly Thatcherite. It is not a one-nation party.

Conservative Members must square what they say about one-nation Conservatism with the fact nearly every one of them voted for the poll tax, for example. If ever there was an example of a divisive policy that was at odds with the tradition of one-nation policy, that is it.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), who made, as ever, a thoughtful speech said that one-nation politics should be the politics of all parties that have an interest in governing this country because it is obvious to anyone who cares to see that one cannot win an election or govern the country without occupying the centre ground. That is one of the Conservative party's problems because it knows that it has moved to the right. It has had defections and it has difficulties and divisions that we all saw tonight. Nothing that Conservative Members say will get away from that. As I said, within even an hour or two, the right-wing were fighting back. Clearly, news travels fast in this place.

The third strand to this debate is the attack on our policy and, in particular, on the concept of stakeholding. Again, there were divisions in the Conservative party. Some Conservative Members said that they did not know what stakeholding was, but, just in case there was any doubt about it, they attacked it. Following the tendency and the example set by the Deputy Prime Minister in his almost daily broadcast to the nation and the Conservative party chairman in his ever more ridiculous claims about our party, others say that they do not know what the policy is, so they fantasise about what it might be and try to reinvent all the straw men that they have enjoyed shooting down for all these years. The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) followed that line, I think inadvertently, because normally his speeches are intelligent and have some basis in fact—but not tonight.

Stakeholding—the concept of individuals having a stake in their country—is surely a matter of common sense. The object is to establish a Government who will enable every individual to have a stake in their country, to succeed and to better themselves and their families. It is no wonder that Conservative Members do not understand what stakeholding is all about: over the past 16 years, their policies have been based on division, prejudice and scapegoating. The whole concept of people having a stake in their country so that they feel motivated and have an incentive to work together for a common purpose is something with which Conservative Members cannot come to terms.

We make it clear in our amendment that investment is the key to this country's future. We shall not get the investment that we need unless we can promote quality and unless we can compete on excellence. We are already doing that in many places, but we need to do it far more. Conservative and Opposition Members have made the point that this country has to deal with a damaging legacy—the damage done to our economic capacity, especially in the 1980s. Unless we expand and enhance the quality of our economic capacity, we shall not be able to compete in the global economy.

In the context of the Bill, the whole concept of stakeholding must be to recognise that there is a mutual purpose for which we all work together as individuals. [HON. MEMBERS: "Mutual?"] Hon. Members howl the word mutual as though there was something wrong with it. Some Conservative Members say that they are one-nation Conservatives. Surely the essence of one-nation Conservatism or the politics of one nation must be that we are concerned about what happens to our neighbour in economic and social terms. If Conservative Members want to make that a difference between us and them at the next election, let them do so. This country's mood is to end the divisions and the prejudice which have been the hallmark of so many Conservative Members in the past few years. I am surprised that some Ministers here this evening are prepared to throw their hat into that ring.

One-nation politics is not an expression of sentiment or of justifiable concern for the less well-off. It is active politics. It means the Government putting into practice the policies that enable individuals to achieve their potential, to get into work, to achieve education and to get the reskilling they need so that they can make their own contribution and improve their own economic circumstances.

Mr. Yeo: If the stakeholder economy is so much a matter of common sense, can the hon. Gentleman now tell us whether the policies that are needed to introduce the stakeholder economy involve a higher level of public expenditure or a lower level? Do they involve an inflation target higher or lower than the present one? Do they involve higher interest rates or lower ones? If it is a matter of common sense, let us have the answers that the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) steadfastly refused to give when he opened the debate.

Mr. Darling: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman has been listening for the past 10 minutes. From looking

[Mr. Darling]

at the Government's record and their spending patterns, I have been pointing out they have got it wrong. We have made it clear time and again that the reason why public spending is so high here is economic failure. That is why we suggested, during our debates on the previous Budget, measures to get people off unemployment and back into work. That would enable them to make a contribution and would cut public spending. If the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) does not understand that, it is no wonder that he is in his present position.

I will illustrate again the concept of stakeholding by reference to the Bill. We see the role of Government as doing those things that individuals by themselves cannot do. The national health service and the transport infrastructure are classic examples. It is not surprising that the Conservatives do not understand that. Surely a high-quality education service must be one of the prerequisites of this country competing successfully.

I give another example, by reference to employee shareholding. Here we have a classic example of the difference between Labour and Conservative Members. The Government have created a climate in which a few who sit on the boards of the privatised utilities have made substantial gains through share options, not because of anything that they have done, but simply because of the way in which the companies were privatised. We believe that share options and incentives should be available to all the people in an enterprise, whether they are in the board room or on the shop floor. We believe that reward should follow success and that it should not be the other way round.

Everybody needs incentives and everybody needs a stake in the company, no matter where he or she is in it. The good companies already recognise that and many companies are putting into place the practices that we would like to see spread throughout British industry. Shareholding should also encourage people to save, a point to which I want to return.

Mr. Jenkin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Darling: As the hon. Gentleman has been shouting for some time, I will give way for one final time. I then want to come to my conclusion.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman has used the word "should" a lot in his recent sentences. He says that companies should do this and should do that. Is he proposing a new range of corporate compulsions or is it just music for Opposition ears?

Mr. Darling: I hate to disappoint the hon. Gentleman. Nothing would please him more than if he were able to claim with any justification a whole battery of new rules and regulations. I suggest—I believe the service is available from the House of Commons Library—that he gets the transcript of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition's interview with David Frost yesterday in which he made the position absolutely clear. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members clearly did not see that interview and are relying solely on handouts from Conservative central office, which is a very unreliable source of information.

We are talking about a change of culture. Many successful companies, and indeed many successful investors in industry are changing their culture. We are talking about ownership and not speculation of the sort that the Government fostered throughout much of the 1980s, which is the hallmark of Conservative philosophy.

On the questions of stakeholding and employment, to which hon. Members on both sides of the House have referred, from the one-nation Conservatives to Opposition Members, surely the Government should have done something in the Budget and the Finance Bill to get those who have been out of work for more than a year back into employment. That problem is socially debilitating as well as economically inefficient. We have a second generation of people who are out of work, which is causing huge strains in society. Any Government ought to be concerned with that. Given everything that the right hon. Member for Wirral, West said, he might reflect that that is what the Government, who he has supported, have done for the past 16 years.

Surely creating and sustaining a high level of employment must be a major objective of Government policy. Again, that is a difference between Labour Members and Conservative Members. Conservative Members seem to be quite happy to pursue the policy of every man for himself and devil take the hindmost.

The hon. Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher) came up with the interesting concept of a virtual company—which I understood him to condemn—whereby there is a core company and everything else is contracted out and people are employed on short-term contracts. Unless I misunderstood him, he seemed to suggest that there was a future in this country having virtual government, or in a virtual country in which a core was required but what was on the periphery was not but could be called into use as and when it was required. I do not think that rather simplistic analysis can be translated into a philosophy of government. If I misunderstood him, I shall by all means give way.

Mr. Butcher: The hon. Gentleman has comprehensively misunderstood me. I was saying that, under a virtual economy, practised on a large scale, like virtual companies, the economy would create more jobs, and the insecurity with which we are all concerned would be alleviated by the rate of job creation. I likened that to an economy in which jobs are safeguarded at any cost, but which removes 20, 30 and 35 per cent. of the population from the job market. I was arguing in exactly the opposite way. The so-called virtual economy and virtual company gives more security through more job creation.

Mr. Darling: I shall study the hon. Gentleman's remarks tomorrow if I have time, and if we have another debate I shall no doubt refer to them.

I want to refer to two or three other points. I shall mention briefly the private finance initiative because it was mentioned be a number of Members. As we have said often enough, we support the general principle. Indeed, I sometimes think that one of the problems with the PFI is that it appears to have run into the ground because it has all-party support. Perhaps if we had opposed it, someone might have put a little more effort into getting it off the ground.

The fundamental problem with the PFI is that the Government will not prioritise the projects. There are 1,400 projects marked A or B, but other than that there is no particular priority. That means that the private sector

spends a considerable period of time and therefore a great deal of money trying to work out the Government's priorities. For that reason, very few projects have got off the ground. There are problems. One is in comparing the true cost of the PFI against projects funded by a conventional means. We, however, support the principle and we shall just have to hope that, in the next year, the Government give the initiative a much-needed kick along the way.

Before I leave the subject, may I submit a request to the Financial Secretary on the channel tunnel? Many of us will have read the increasingly strident tones of Sir Alastair Morton, which appear to be designed to secure a Government handout to bail out the channel tunnel. If the Government change their policy, I hope that they will make a full statement and that they will not attempt to do anything in a back door, underhand way, especially when it comes to announcing what is to be done about the channel tunnel link. We know the Government and we shall be watching them carefully.

Other points raised included self-assessment. We support the principle behind self-assessment, but we remind Conservative Members that they told us that there was nothing to worry about with the poll tax and its administration. Perhaps the current Defence Secretary will now reflect on his comment that the poll tax would be the most popular measure ever. Before Conservative Members say too much about self-assessment, they should realise that there is a real risk that some people will end up paying more tax than they should, while others will manage to evade paying it. That would be undesirable.

Much has been said today about savings and we will return to the subject in Committee. Suffice it to say that we welcome what the Government have done so far. However, hon. Members on both sides of the House know that much more must be done to encourage people to save in the long term, not just the short term.

The Financial Secretary will no doubt refer to the advertisements placed in newspapers by the Prime Minister at the beginning of this year. He may wish to reflect on questions that have been asked often enough, but bear repetition because we have had no answers. Why has Britain fallen from 13th to 18th in the world prosperity league? Why is Britain's share of world trade now the lowest this century? We know that our questions are hitting home because the Government have no answers. Why are one in three children in Britain in poverty, compared with only one in 10 in 1979? Why has Britain, under the Tories, had the biggest tax rise in peacetime history—despite the fact that they promised the opposite in 1992? Why, after 16 years of Conservative government and after all the protests this evening about one-nation Conservatism, is our country so divided?

Those are the questions that the Government must answer. Because we know that the Government cannot answer them, we feel fully justified in voting against the Bill's Second Reading tonight.

9.41 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Michael Jack): The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) must have taken his speech from the St. Peter's school of political debate, because thrice he will deny his own party before the cock crows. He wants to deny that his party opposed our pioneering sales of council houses, thereby giving people a real stake in home ownership. He wants to deny that his party opposed giving people a big stake in privatisation. His comments on education were beyond belief because the Budget makes an additional £775 million available to schools.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will my hon. Friend join me in hoping that county councils such as Lancashire pass on that additional money to schools, as they should?

Mr. Jack: Conservative Members of Parliament in Lancashire flushed out the Labour party's attempt to take money away from Lancashire schools. The council has now had to recant and make that money available. I am glad that my hon. Friend raised that point.

Conservative Members made some very good speeches tonight and I shall deal with them first. I welcome the remarks by my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin). He had to wait for some time to be called, but what he had to say was important. In particular, he pointed out that we have started on a downward trend in taxation. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has not been prepared to play fast and loose with Britain's economy; instead, he waited until we gained control over public spending to begin to reduce taxes. [*Laughter.*] Those were difficult policies, even if they attract derision from the Opposition. It shows that the Conservative party can take difficult decisions while effectively suffering those who criticise us for doing so.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) has had a long-standing interest in Finance Bill debates. He mentioned publishing draft clauses and I welcome his support for that. A great deal of consultation has been undertaken to try to improve the quality of our legislation and I welcome his words on that. I shall draw his comments about a European currency to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), another hon Member who has taken much interest in these matters, made some important points. I was pleased to hear his comments on self-assessment, on which I shall have more to say later. I am grateful for his praise for the way in which the Inland Revenue is working, using consultation, an advisory committee formed from all sections of business and individual representations on self-assessment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield commented on the improvements achieved by the reforms, and he will know that the decision to change the way in which the Inland Revenue operates was not taken lightly. The subject was debated twice in the House and was welcomed in principle by hon. Members. It is now being tested on some 5,000 taxpayers in Leicester, and the experiment is proving to be a success.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander) said that the measures incorporated in the Budget, and hence in the Bill, have been widely welcomed. I was reminded that Sir Ronald Hampel, the chairman of ICI, commented:

> "The Budget should enable the economy to grow at a healthy rate over the next two years."

That comment was made by a leading multinational and international business man and should be respected.

[Mr. Jack]

I noted my hon. Friend's comments on British Sugar and the problems that it faces with soil disposal and rhizomania. I understand the seriousness of the issue, and I undertake to draw his comments to the attention of my hon. Friend the Paymaster General. I extend that undertaking to hon. Members who asked about the Manchester ship canal.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jack: Will the hon. Gentleman wait a minute?

My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg) put his finger on an important omission in Opposition Members' speeches. I aim to show that they are not only incapable of answering simple questions about their economic policies but are remarkably silent on some of the ideas that they claim are unique, election-winning and even are their own. My hon. Friend cited the so-called 10p tax soundbite as one such claim. Where is it? There is no mention of it in the Opposition amendment.

If they had any pride in their policies, the Opposition would be prepared to test them out in the House, but clearly they have none. We took the trouble to cost their 10p tax proposal, and we discovered that it would cost £8 billion. When I raised that matter on "Any Questions", the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) suddenly withdrew and suggested that the 10p band might not cover the same range as our 20p band. Realising that he was broadcasting to the nation, the hon. Gentleman immediately shut up and that was the last we heard of the 10p band. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for flushing the Opposition out on that point.

Dr. Reid: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jack: I do not think I will, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central took away some of my time. If I have time, I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West for his endorsement of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee's broad welcome for the Budget and, in due course, the Treasury will officially reply to the points that he made.

My hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher) made a very perceptive speech. Opposition Members chided the Government about the number of people in employment. If they had listened to my hon. Friend's sage remarks, they would understand that structural change has inevitably influenced the number of jobs that can be created in the economy. My hon. Friend remarked that our supply side changes are helping to create an opportunity to respond to technical change and added that more jobs are being created than ever before, hence the fact that 730,000 fewer people are on the unemployment register than when the recession was at its peak. My hon. Friend made some telling and important points.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) focused, as always, on savings and shares, and I am grateful for his support for the measures in the Bill that deal with those subjects. He also made a telling contribution in identifying one of the Bill's most important proposals—the three further steps towards achieving a standard tax rate of 20p. That policy is evident for all to see. Its analysis is clear, unlike Opposition Members' approach to tax.

The three steps are a penny off the basic rate to 24p—which is a penny nearer 20p—a widening by £700 of the 20p band and, most importantly, the taxation of savings at a rate of 20p. There are real gains that I hope all hon. Members will support in the coming Finance Bill debates.

I also welcome the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington on the subject of further share ownership. If one listened to the Opposition, one would think that they had invented the concept of wider share ownership. Our enhancements of schemes such as save-as-you-earn and profit-sharing have already enabled 2 million people to have a real stake in the companies they work for. I expect that those programmes will expand and I expect the Opposition to show their support for them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington also promoted his own agenda on the subject of what he called a PIP—a personal investment plan. I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will be interested to hear what he has to say about it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) let his views on the Budget be known in no uncertain terms. I was grateful for his support, particularly his underscoring of the fact that the Budget and the Finance Bill address the question of sound money in this country. He properly drew our attention to the reduction in national insurance charges—another important measure in the Budget which will put some £500 million back into the pockets of industry and help it in its quest to create jobs.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding rightly drew the attention of the House to my right hon. and learned Friend's improvement in plans to reduce public spending, which now amount to some £44 billion.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) chose to concentrate his remarks on the subject of capital gains tax, as did my hon. Friends the Members for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher) and for Milton Keynes, South-West. I hope that they will accept that the Government have a clear, long-term commitment to the ultimate abolition of capital gains tax.

I hope that the hon. Member for South Suffolk will remember that there are many ways in which companies and individuals can mitigate the effects of that tax. Unincorporated businesses can set trading losses against capital tax, and rollover relief is available. In this Budget we have expanded the retirement relief in relation to the age limit of 50, which means that the first £250,000 of gains are exempt. The role of venture capital trusts should not be underestimated in that respect.

My hon. Friend also drew our attention to some of the exchanges which have occurred on the subject of a stakeholder economy. I was taken by the comments of the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) on the stakeholder economy. He lifted the veil on what the stakeholder economy meant for the Labour party when he said in *The Times* of 15 January that the Opposition leader's vision meant a fresh lease of life for union barons.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), whom I am pleased to see has returned to his place, discussed the private finance initiative, as did the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central. I assure them that we take some of criticisms that have been made about the PFI extremely seriously. At the beginning of the year, we published "Private Opportunity, Public Benefit" precisely to send a clear signal that we intend to tackle some of those issues.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central was perhaps confused in some of his remarks. Private finance is a new way of procuring services to give overall better value for money. We are dedicated to seeing that through and to achieving our objectives. He mentioned the problem of people who may have orders for 2,300 litres of oil for domestic heating purposes and so are subject to the higher rate of VAT. If it can be amply demonstrated that the oil is for domestic use, I assure him that it is possible to have the VAT charged at the lower rate. If I may, I shall write to him on that point more fully.

The right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) chastised us on the subject of investment, as did a number of Opposition Members. It is remarkable that they do not wish to know what is happening in the economy. It is forecast that business investment will grow by 9 per cent. in 1996 and by a further 6.75 per cent. in 1997 and beyond. It is forecast that manufacturing investment will grow by 10 per cent. in 1995 and 1996. Since 1979, investment in our economy has grown faster than in any major European Union country and six times faster than it grew under the previous Government. That is the investment reality.

The hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) tried to entertain us because he and the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central have managed to get their name in *The Guardian* today, arguing that we were deficient regarding our tax burden. Do not Opposition Members realise that when in government, they got away with an artificially low tax take as a percentage of GDP only because their borrowing was so great? Their borrowing averaged 7 per cent. of GDP; under the present Government, borrowing has been 3 per cent. If the Labour Government had sustained their position, there would have been an increase of about 10p in the standard rate of tax. Let us have a fair comparison of taxes, not an improper one.

If the Labour Government's policies had remained in place, under their tax regime another 1 million people would now pay tax. By contrast, the Budget has taken about 220,000 people out of tax. Let us talk the facts about tax.

Mr. Andrew Smith: While the Minister is speaking about tax, will he tell the House why the share of national income going in taxation will be greater next year than it was last year, and why, under the present Government, tax is planned to increase every year, as a share of national income, until the end of the century? Is not that the price of the Government's social and economic failure?

Mr. Jack: How can the hon. Gentleman have the cant and hypocrisy to ask me that question after the analysis that I have given him? I drew attention to the fact that the Labour figures were distorted because Labour Governments were leaving their IOUs for succeeding generations. Another 10p on standard rate and another million people paying tax would have been the product of your borrowing requirements. Those are the facts.

I tried hard to discover the way in which the Labour party dreamed up its policies, and I found the answer in Robert Peston's column in the *Financial Times* on 11 January 1996. He said that Labour's approach is the virtual reality approach to economy. They put on the headset, look into the goggles and see the world that they want to see, forgetting the fact that they must return to the reality of the economy as it is.

With that virtual reality approach, I ask the Opposition some questions. They obviously are incapable of taking an A-level in economics, but let us pitch the questions at the level of a GCSE in economics. My right hon. and hon. Friends have asked important questions earlier, so let us ask them again.

Do you have a target for inflation? No; you do not. Do you have a target for interest rates? No; you do not. Will you ensure that public spending is reduced to zero by the end of the decade, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor said in the Red Book? I expect that you do not have an answer to that. [HON. MEMBERS: "You?"] Do you even agree with our concept of a 20p tax band? I will give way if you can answer any of those questions. I would give way if you would answer any of these questions.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Will the Financial Secretary give way?

Mr. Jack: Not to you. I will certainly give way—

Hon. Members: You?

Madam Speaker: I think the Minister has been getting rather carried away in the last few minutes. Perhaps he will refer to the Speaker, as he is referring to "you". He should be speaking through the Chair.

Mr. Jack: I am sorry if my enthusiasm to tease from the Opposition their true economic policies led me to show any discourtesy to the Chair. It certainly was not my objective.

If it is impossible for the Opposition to answer those simple questions, why was it possible yesterday, on "Breakfast with Frost", for the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), in a moment, to tell the interviewer that he did not have a plan for a 50p tax rate? If he could be certain in that moment, why are Opposition Members so uncertain about every other aspect of their economic policies?

Much has been said about league tables today. The policies contained in the Finance Bill will lead us to the top of the economic achievement league in Europe. The Government's policies will help to kindle further growth in the economy and I urge all hon. Members to support the Bill tonight.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 251, Noes 309.

Division No. 21] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Armstrong, Hilary
Adams, Mrs Irene	Ashton, Joe
Ainger, Nick	Austin-Walker, John
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*	Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Allen, Graham	Battle, John
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*	Bayley, Hugh
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*	Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret

Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Joe Benton and
Mr. Eric Clarke.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian

Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by're)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Derek Conway.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 60 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading):—

The House divided: Ayes 309, Noes 274.

Division No. 22] **[10.16 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim

Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'lre)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S*(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and Mr. Derek Conway.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh

Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Davis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Joe Benton and
Mr. Eric Clarke.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Ordered,

That—

(1) Clauses 36, 105, 112 and 139 and Schedule 15 be committed to a Committee of the whole House;

(2) the remainder of the Bill be committed to a Standing Committee;

(3) when the provisions of the Bill considered, respectively, by the Committee of the whole House and by the Standing Committee have been reported to the House, the Bill be proceeded with as if the Bill had been reported as a whole to the House from the Standing Committee.—*[Mr. Jack.]*

Committee tomorrow.

AGRICULTURE

Ordered,

That Ms Jean Corston and Mr. George Stevenson be discharged from the Agriculture Committee and Mr. Robin Corbett and Mr. Martyn Jones be added to the Committee.—[*Sir Fergus Montgomery, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*]

TREASURY

Ordered,

That Mr. Giles Radice be discharged from the Treasury Committee and Mr. Stephen Timms be added to the Committee.—[*Sir Fergus Montgomery, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*]

WELSH AFFAIRS

Ordered,

That Mr. David Hanson be discharged from the Welsh Affairs Committee and Mr. Don Touhig be added to the Committee.—[*Sir Fergus Montgomery, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*]

Soft Drugs

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

10.29 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): The Minister will not be surprised to learn that I will concentrate on exposing the dangers of Ecstasy. I know that—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Will hon. Members leaving the Chamber do so quietly, please?

Mr. Evans: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I know that the Minister will concentrate on all the good work that the Government are doing to tackle the drugs problem, but I hope that he will also be able to take on board some of the suggestions that I will make.

I applied for the Adjournment several weeks ago—before the appalling tragedy that occurred at the weekend—because I felt that the problem of so-called "designer" drugs such as Ecstasy needed to be tackled urgently.

We are aware of the headline cases of Daniel Ashton, of Blackpool, which is not far from my constituency; Leah Betts and, just this weekend, the appalling wasted young life of Andreas Bouzis. How many more of our young people will be wasted or destroyed by Ecstasy before the message gets home?

Today, on radio, I was accused of being emotional about the issue, and I was told that I should simply look at the facts of taking Ecstasy. I make no apologies for being emotional over the needless death of our young people. I make no apologies for being emotional about the waste of lives and the damage to the quality of life of our young people who are ignorant of the life-destroying side-effects of taking Ecstasy.

I do not want to stop anyone enjoying himself, but at the same time I want to stop young people killing themselves or wasting their lives. A lot of misinformation is given about Ecstasy, but we are seeing what has been termed one of the biggest mass experiments in the history of mankind, with up to half a million tablets taken every weekend.

I should like to praise the efforts of Granada Television and its programme, "This Morning" for distributing more than 8,000 copies of the video "Sorted", which is the story of Leah Betts' life and death. That video is required viewing for anyone who feels that it simply will not happen to him or her. I pay tribute to Paul and Jan Betts, who I met recently, for their bravery in sharing their personal tragedy with the rest of nation, which, we hope, will deter other young people from taking Ecstasy.

I watched Mrs. Josephine Bouzis talk movingly on television about her son, and that has made me more determined than ever that stiffer and more urgent action is needed to clear the streets, night clubs, pubs and schools of the scum who trade in misery and death.

I have heard the arguments of those who say that we have lost control of drugs and that we should legalise them. I am delighted that the Home Secretary is resolutely against that disastrous course of action. I applaud the work

of the police, customs officials and voluntary workers, who are fighting the battle. I believe that we all could and should do more.

Others argue that there would be no problem if all the tablets were tested. Let me remind the House that Leah Betts died after taking a pure Ecstasy tablet. Those tablets are toxic—they are poison. There are those who say that alcohol and tobacco have killed more people than drugs. That is no argument for relaxing the controls on drugs, but it is one for improving the education of our young people about the dangers of abusing those substances.

What is Ecstasy? We have heard a lot about it, but I suspect that many hon. Members knew nothing about it until 12 months ago. It was patented in 1914 in Germany as an appetite suppressant, MDMA. It is commonly known as Ecstasy, but it has several other names. It is a semi-synthetic chemical compound. In its pure form it is usually a pressed pill, a capsule or even loose powder. It costs between £10 and £20. How cheap the cost of a life these days.

The drug is taken orally, although it can be taken in other ways. The usual dose ranges from 80 mg to 160 mg when taken orally, although the amounts vary widely, depending on how unlucky the taker is. When MDMA is taken orally, the effects manifest themselves about half an hour later, gradually working up to the full effect in two hours. The after-effects can last for days. The psychological effects, however, can last for years.

Ecstasy's physical symptoms are wide ranging and can be very subtle. They include dryness of mouth, jaw-clenching, teeth-grinding, sweating or nausea. At higher doses, the effects include increased heart beat, sweating and dizziness. The drug works mainly on one group of neurones, a serotonin system. The centre of the cells, their nuclei, are clustered at the base of our brains. From there, long, wire-like tendrils spread throughout the brain. Users usually experience amphetamine-type stimulation, with appetite loss and the ability to stay awake for long periods.

Ecstasy also produces hyperactivity, but of a repetitive sort that makes one do the same thing over and again. Illicit laboratories are often set up with little concern for cleanliness. According to Joseph Bono, a supervisory chemist in the special testing department of the American Drug Enforcement Agency, there are many contaminants and by-products in samples that reach his laboratory for analysis. It would seem that not everyone has the same high standards as Glaxo-Wellcome. The Dutch Government should be doing much more to investigate the factories that churn out these tablets by the millions, which then find themselves on this country's streets.

Why do people take E in the first place? As reported in the "Equinox" programme "Rave New World", shown on Channel 4 last year, the major Ecstasy scene began in this country in 1988 with the advent of acid house music. That was the birth of the rave scene and the drug Ecstasy was a major factor in its subsequent success. People who took the drug reported that it made them feel amiable and friendly to strangers, and that they could dance all night. As one raver put it:

"There was just this massive rush of . . . happiness."

Despite being a class-A drug, which means that dealing carries a maximum life sentence, tens, perhaps hundreds of thousands of doses are taken every week. It is estimated that up to 2 million Britons have tried Ecstasy.

According to Dr. John Henry, a consultant physician for the national poisons unit at Guy's hospital:

"In the late 1980s, the drug was reformulated . . . in a cultural sense. The rave scene in England provided a new formula, a new package, a new culture."

With that new culture, however, came the new dangers that have proved lethal to a host of young people, including the most recent tragic death of Andreas Bouzis in a south London club at the weekend.

There is no debate that one damages oneself when one takes Ecstasy, but as yet no one knows the extent of the long-term effects. If we do not do something to remedy that, the effects could be disastrous. In most of the serious cases reported, the users had collapsed unconscious or started to convulse while dancing. The most important things to remember about this drug are that previous experience is no guarantee of safety and that Ecstasy hides discomfort and pain. That means that, if people overheat or dehydrate from dancing for too long, instead of resting for a while and getting some cold air or a drink, they may just carry on dancing until they reach a fatal temperature. In the same way, it would normally be impossible to drink enough water to kill oneself. However, Leah Betts drank three litres of water.

As Ecstasy causes a rise in blood pressure, it can also be fatal to someone with a weak heart, and asthmatics have been known to die from attacks under the drug's influence. There is also the possibility of kidney failure. Lastly, some deaths are due to people simply being allergic to the drug or by Ecstasy reacting with other drugs that the person may be taking at that time. It is known to react badly with certain anti-depressants.

Dr. Henry put the immediate dangers most succinctly:

"Your blood clotting goes haywire, your brain begins to dysfunction and your heart can pack up."

However, there is serious cause for concern at the long-term risks to the mental and physical health of people who take Ecstasy on a regular basis. Dr. Karl Jansen of Maudsley hospital had a patient who took about 100 Ecstasy tablets and who

"had depersonalisation/derealisation syndrome [where the person lacks emotion and feels unreal]. Its very unpleasant and has lasted over 2 years."

He also warns that anxiety disorders can be caused by the use of this drug:

"you feel anxious all the time, or chronic in the form of panic attacks. Depression and mania definitely can be triggered by Ecstasy."

The most worrying data for people who use Ecstasy regularly must be that produced by Dr. Ricaute, assistant professor of neurology at the John Hopkins School of Medicine. In his study, 17 monkeys were given doses equivalent to that of three average street tablets of Ecstasy and they were analysed for regional brain content of serotonin after two weeks. His findings showed a striking loss of certain nerve fibres in the cerebral cortex of the monkeys. Commenting on the findings, Dr. Ricaute said:

"The data we have so far is that MDMA is a highly neuro-toxic substance, that if taken . . . could result in brain injury . . . MDMA has the potential for producing neuro-toxic effects, at least in animals, after a single moderate dose."

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): My hon. Friend has kindly allowed me to say a few words here. First, I praise him for bringing up this horrible subject in an Adjournment debate. Secondly, I want to comment on the

[Mr. Tim Rathbone]

fact that the debate is described on the Order Paper as being about "soft drugs". The House has heard my hon. Friend's description of what Ecstasy can do. In no way can such a drug be described as a soft drug. There is no such thing as a soft drug. Drugs do terrible harm and my hon. Friend is absolutely correct to draw the House's attention to the harm that Ecstasy can do. I am glad that that is recognised in the Government's White Paper and in their activities to educate young people to keep away from all drugs. I am sure that my hon. Friend praises that.

Mr. Evans: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind comments. He is right to say that many people consider Ecstasy to be a soft drug. It is, of course, a class A drug, but the perception is that it is different from other hard drugs. It is not, for all the reasons that I and my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) have given.

I shall now suggest one or two areas in which the Government will, I hope, seriously consider taking further action, along with the excellent programme they have to tackle drugs on the wider scale. I know that we have the drugs help line and the crimestoppers line. I congratulate the *Daily Mirror* which has given £10,000 to the crimestoppers line to encourage people to give information about those who are pushing drugs. That is commendable and I hope that other newspapers will follow that lead.

However, many people cannot remember the numbers of the drugs help line or the crimestoppers line. There is probably more chance of getting through to the cones hot line than of getting through to the other numbers. I suggest that just as we have a three-digit number for accidents and emergencies, we should have a drugs hotline number of three digits—perhaps 911—which everybody could remember. That would be extremely useful for people in clubs and pubs who could then use the number to give information about people pushing drugs.

There should be better rewards for those who give information that leads to the prosecution of those who push drugs in our pubs and clubs. In the vast majority of cases, people give the information freely because they know that it could help to save the lives of their friends. However, those who have, for example, information from the drugs underworld may be lured by the possibility of getting at least some money for giving information that will put the criminals behind bars and will lead to many more drugs being destroyed.

There is also the problem of drugs being distributed in pubs and clubs. I praise the work of the British Entertainment and Discotheque Association in producing a booklet which is aimed at club and pub owners so that they can spot some of the telltale signs of whether drugs are being pushed or used in their clubs. Unfortunately, not every pub owner and club owner is responsible. We should give support to the police and new guidelines to the courts. If it is obvious that the owners of the pubs and clubs are turning a blind eye to what is going on in their premises and if the people who are using them cannot be guaranteed to be safe, the pubs and clubs should be closed down.

There should be more research into the long-term ill-effects of taking Ecstasy and other so-called "designer" drugs. We must get across to young people the fact that it is not simply that people die—that is tragic enough, as one can see from the families and friends who are left behind—but that there are long-term effects on those who take the drugs. They are under a lot of pressure. I believe that in 10 or 15 years' time—perhaps a lot sooner than that—we shall see the side-effects of taking Ecstasy and how appalling the consequences can be to individuals and their families. When we have that information, we must get it into clubs, pubs, youth clubs, night clubs and schools so that it reaches the youth culture, which has put Ecstasy on such a pedestal that it is considered different from other drugs Then we will be able to expose Ecstasy for what it is. We must however remember that the vast majority of young people go to night clubs and pubs and enjoy themselves without taking any Ecstasy whatever, and long may that continue.

I congratulate Radio 1 on the campaigns that it regularly runs. It has a mass youth audience and it is able to reach the people to whom we need to talk. I understand that it is starting another campaign in October. Given the problem of the number of people taking so-called designer drugs, I hope that it will consider either bringing forward that campaign or running another one directed specifically at so-called designer drugs.

We need to ram the message home. We need to redouble our efforts on all fronts. I am certain that we can win this war; more important, this is a war that we must win.

10.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) on bringing this subject to the Floor of the House and on the way in which he has addressed it—packing his facts and ideas into a short space of time. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) for his pertinent intervention.

I suppose that, if one is looking for a text for this debate, one need look no further than the words spoken on behalf of the young girl Helen Cousins—they were not spoken by her, because she could not speak—who survived the horror of Ecstasy. Her words to us and other young people were:

"Ecstasy is not worth the dance with death."

We should seek to promote that lesson, today and always.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley referred to the tragic death of Daniel Ashton in Blackpool, and to Leah Betts, whose death continues to weigh heavily on all our minds. As he also said, in my borough of Wandsworth last weekend, I was called out because another tragedy had struck. This time, the young Andreas Bouzis from the Greek Cypriot community died as a result of taking Ecstasy at a club.

Those individual tragedies are salutary reminders to us all of the misery and havoc that drugs can bring to the lives of ordinary, close-loving families. The blight of drugs is a worldwide phenomenon. It wrecks lives—all too often young lives—it undermines families, causing untold heartache and worry for parents, brothers and sisters of its victims when it strikes, and of course it shakes communities through crime and the fear of crime.

That is why the Prime Minister has made it clear that tackling the drugs problem is a priority for the Government. The White Paper "Tackling Drugs

Together", which we published in May and was signed by five Ministers from Departments across the Government, set out a three-year strategy to bring all the weapons available to bear on the drugs problem.

For my Department, one of the key tasks in the strategy is to help stop young people experimenting with drugs in the first place—to persuade those who are dabbling at the edges of the drugs scene to stop and seek safer pleasures elsewhere, and to plant the seeds of doubt in those who are misusing drugs regularly.

One of the first tasks is to tackle the comforting distinction to which my hon. Friends have referred: the so-called distinction between soft and hard drugs. It gives the misleading and dangerously reassuring message to misusers that the so-called recreational drugs can be taken with impunity. The word "soft" does not carry the associations of the needle, the crack house, addiction, prostitution and disease, which are conjured up by heroin addicts or crack cocaine users. Among the great majority of young people, that hard drug scene is simply seen as sad and pathetic, and a world distant from their own experience.

It would be foolish to suggest that all drugs are of equal harm. That is not the Government's view. There is a spectrum of harm on various levels. Some drugs, such as heroin, are harmful because of their addictive qualities and the life style that often flows from addiction. Some are harmful because of the way in which they are administered—whether ingested, injected or inhaled. Inhaling butane can and does kill. Injecting drugs risks transmission of blood-borne diseases. Taking pills of dubious content is a lottery.

No serious commentator is suggesting that smoking cannabis equates with injecting heroin, but it is naive to say that soft drugs are risk-free. In fact, so-called soft drugs do carry risks, which is why they remain proscribed. Ecstasy, to which my hon. Friend referred in particular, is a case in point.

The law clearly regards Ecstasy as a hard drug. It has been classified under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, and its illicit use is subject to the strictest penalties. As it is a class A drug, those in possession of Ecstasy can be imprisoned for up to seven years, and those trafficking in it can be imprisoned for life.

My hon. Friend suggested that sentences should be tougher. No doubt the courts will take note of the points he made, but he will be aware that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has announced radical new proposals on sentencing. They recognise that persistent drug dealers are a menace to society, deserving of long stretches in prison. My right hon. and learned Friend has proposed that there should be a stiff minimum sentence for persistent dealers. I, too, want to draw attention to the crimestoppers initiative and its "Say no and phone" campaign to encourage information about dealers.

As for clubs which turn a blind eye to people dealing or misusing drugs, licensing authorities have powers to revoke the entertainment licence of any establishment that does not meet the conditions of that licence. I would expect them to do so in such circumstances.

Although science, Government and misusers still know relatively little about Ecstasy and its effects, what we do know argues clearly against any description of the drug as "soft". It can cause psychological dependence. Misusers may experience irritability, depression, insomnia or hypothermia after the initial effects have worn off. Feelings of paranoia are not uncommon, and cases of paranoid psychosis have been reported. There is also evidence of an association between Ecstasy use and liver damage.

My Department has been working—as my hon. Friend asked us—on expanding our understanding of the drug. Dr. John Henry, of the national poisons unit at Guy's, a leading expert on the toxic effects of Ecstasy, has been particularly helpful. We are learning of syndromes associated with the drug, such as the repetitive behaviour to which my hon. Friend referred. I understand that one individual obsessively smoked hundreds of cigarettes in the space of hours, leading to death through traumatic damage to his respiratory system. Others may do the same when drinking water. What is clear is that, as knowledge expands, it is knowledge about risks, not benefits.

The content of these illicitly manufactured tablets is highly variable, with fly-by-night chemists in far-off places producing pills made up of a range of chemicals. The effects are correspondingly variable. People who take the drug do not know what they have taken until it has taken effect and it is too late.

Finally, we are all aware of the tragic deaths that have been linked to this drug. Again, we still have much to learn about the drug's toxicity, but symptoms attributed to Ecstasy-related deaths include convulsions, dilated pupils, very low blood pressure, accelerated heart rate, high temperature and coma. Death through heart failure is known to have occurred, but most deaths have been caused by respiratory collapse resulting from blood coagulating in the lungs. So much, then, for the "soft" drug label.

My hon. Friend has urged us to send a message, and the key aim for Government is to arm both young people and their parents with the facts about drugs—the health risks, the risks of addiction, the legal risks, the risk of damaging relationships with friends and families and the risk to future careers. We cannot simply state the risks and then walk away from the problem: we also need to give young people the skills they need to be able to make informed and responsible decisions to resist drugs misuse. Over the next three years, the Department of Health will be co-ordinating publicity campaigns and developing and improving access to materials aimed at motivating young people to resist drug misuse.

My hon. Friend has referred to the drugs helpline, and he may have seen or heard the advertisements promoting it. Calls to the service are free and confidential, and lines are open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The helpline number—for my hon. Friend's benefit—is 0800 77 66 00.

The staff who run the helpline have a good knowledge of drug misuse issues and can refer those callers who need specialist help to agencies that can provide the right advice and support. I would urge anyone who wants to know more or who is worried about drugs misuse by a friend or a family member to contact the helpline.

My hon. Friend raised the possibility of a new three-figure drugs hotline number for emergencies. The helpline is an advice line, and callers who are faced with an emergency are advised to dial 999 immediately—a caller to another three-figure number would be given the same advice. The early signs are that the people are using the longer number—20,000 calls were answered in

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November alone. I will, however, bear in mind my hon. Friend's suggestion when we are considering the evaluation of the helpline in the spring. Meanwhile, the number is 0800 77 66 00.

Misusers and those at risk of misuse are, of course, a key focus of our campaigns, but we are also addressing the needs of parents. I am acutely aware of the powerlessness that parents can sometimes feel in the face of drug misuse or the suspicion of drugs misuse in their family. The fear and anguish that drugs misuse can cause to them is immeasurable.

I know that hon Members will wish to join me in paying tribute to the parents of Leah Betts. Their dignity in such tragic circumstances, and their determination to prevent other families from suffering as they have, has been remarkable. We have seen no less courage and dignity from the Cousins and Bouzis families.

The aim of our campaigns for parents has been to help parents tackle drugs issues with their children, to give practical advice on how to approach such a sensitive issue, to help them recognise the signs of drugs misuse or solvent abuse in their children, to tell parents where they can go for more help or information, and to inform them about the drugs their children might be misusing and the language that young people use to talk about them. The demand for this literature has been remarkable. There is clearly a thirst for knowledge about drugs among parents, and we will continue to work to meet that need.

There are no quick and easy solutions to the complex problem of drugs misuse. The Government's strategy represents a new impetus to galvanise all the key players in a determined and concerted effort on a range of fronts to tackle drugs together. In taking all this work forward, what must remain at the forefront of all our minds is the human element—the individual tragedies of ruined lives and distraught parents. It is those tragedies which lie at the heart of "Tackling Drugs Together", and that is why the Government will continue the fight against drugs misuse with vigour and determination.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 16 January 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

Patient Care (Birmingham)

1. **Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last visited an NHS hospital in Birmingham to discuss patient care. [7491]

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): My right hon. Friend visited Good Hope Hospital NHS trust Sutton Coldfield last Friday, when he met staff and patients.

Mr. Rooker: Does the Minister accept that people in hospital may get too much care because their discharge is delayed by a lack of adequate, immediately available community care facilities? Will he study carefully the plans and proposals of a qualified constituent of mine that I sent him before Christmas? They suggest a fast-track approach with perhaps a small part of the budget being given to health service discharge planners to help people move more quickly out of acute beds so that there would be no bed-blocking. That would save the NHS a fortune, help people to be discharged more quickly and release more beds for acute care.

Mr. Malone: I read with great care the letter that the hon. Gentleman's constituent sent him. It contained a number of very practical proposals, all of which, fortunately, need no change to national policy to be implemented. I, too, happened to be in the Birmingham area on Friday and travelled to Nuneaton, where I saw a hospital at which such a partnership was in action and social services had a halfway-home ward in which people were able to step down and get rehabilitation treatment before they went into the community. The NHS executive published a book in 1984 that gave guidance on discharge. Of course, we are always happy to learn where best practice tells us that we can do better, but with local action I believe that we can make a great impact on the problem. The hon. Gentleman's constituent made some very valid points on that.

Sir Norman Fowler: May I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for the action that he is taking to improve accident and emergency services at Good Hope hospital in Sutton Coldfield? However, I hope that he will also recognise that a new admission ward is needed and that, if one was introduced, it would make long waits on trolleys a thing of the past. I hope that he will consider that.

Mr. Malone: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for acknowledging the progress that has been made at Good Hope hospital, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was able on Friday to be at a press conference where it was announced that 65 beds were being brought back into service. That was a step in the right direction. I have listened carefully to what my right hon. Friend said about the proposals put forward by the trust. I understand that they are being evaluated by the regional health authority, which I expect to look rigorously at the proposals and do what it can constructively to help to alleviate the problem at Good Hope.

Mr. Burden: While I welcome the announcement on beds at Good Hope, when will the Minister recognise that Birmingham is being short-changed on national health service spending and the fact that the 1.1 per cent. increase on spending announced by the Minister before Christmas amounts to only 0.5 per cent. in Birmingham? That will result in cuts in the community facilities mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) and could make the difference as to whether 75 community psychiatric nurses are in post. When will he do something about that?

Mr. Malone: I saw with some interest the proposal put forward by the local community health council, which seemed to suggest that there was underfunding in Birmingham of some 20 per cent. However, there is, of course, an equitable weighted capitation process in England that allocates funds. I should like to discover from the hon. Gentleman some time whether he is saying that he is committed to undoing the weighted capitation system. Can his Front Benchers commit his party to doing that in a way that would automatically bring more funds to bear in Birmingham? Unless he is undertaking to do so, his observation is entirely irrelevant. I would have hoped that what he might rather have done is to look at the forthcoming merger between the two Birmingham health authorities, which will immediately result in £1.2 million of savings, which will be available for added patient care.

Psychiatric Community Nurses

2. **Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the change in the number of psychiatric community nurses since 1979. [7492]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis): The number of whole-time equivalent nurses working in the community psychiatric area has increased from 1,080 in 1981, which is the earliest year for which figures are available, to 4,760 in 1994, an increase of 340 per cent.

Mr. Atkinson: While I think that my hon. Friend and his predecessor should be given full credit for that impressive increase, which clearly demonstrates the Government's commitment to the mentally ill, does he agree that his Department's report into homicides and suicides by mentally ill people provides even more evidence that there are still not enough psychiatric community nurses to go round to give that essential face-to-face contact with patients—especially schizophrenia patients—to make a success of our community care approach?

In the light of the patients charter for the mentally ill, which our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has recently announced, can my hon. Friend now announce a further substantial increase in the number of psychiatric community nurses?

Mr. Bowis: My hon. Friend has referred to the confidential inquiry report, which was set against the background of a decreasing proportion of homicides committed by mentally ill people.

Any homicide or act of violence against oneself or somebody else is a matter of concern to us, which is why we asked the inquiry to investigate whether there are common threads that run through such cases. The thread it highlighted is professionals' failure, in some cases, to communicate with each other. That observation ties in with the requirements that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has placed on every health authority in the country to report to us on the state of the care programme, the mix of beds and community services and the plans that they have in each case to correct any shortcomings.

We shall look carefully at all those programmes to ensure that the service in every district is up to the standard that we know exists in the best districts.

Dr. Wright: How does the Minister's reply relate to the case of my constituent, Dylan Thomas Jones, a mentally ill patient about whom I wrote to every agency that was involved in his case? I told them that he was likely to kill either himself or someone else unless the most urgent action was taken. A few weeks ago, he killed himself. I wrote to the Department of Health to say that that might happen.

May I tell the Minister that, as far as the people of this country are concerned, including Mr. Jones' mother, community care for that category of patient has become a euphemism for the most monstrous neglect? Instead of waiting for another inquiry or another such death, will the Minister tell us what the Government are going to do about the problem?

Mr. Bowis: That case is a tragedy, and we feel for the family or families concerned. After any such case, the Department of Health and the national health service order a full investigation into what has gone wrong. The lessons learnt are fed into the programming and planning of our mental health services. I can make that pledge, today and always, to the hon. Gentleman.

In return, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will have the goodness to acknowledge the real progress made in the care and treatment of mentally ill people, which is much more humane than it was some decades ago. Dedicated doctors, nurses and social workers are working with families and individuals to make that possible. When Professor Norman Sartorius, the distinguished president of the World Psychiatry Association, came to Britain, he said:

"Our recent developments in improving mental health services will ensure that the UK continues to lead the world in this area".

We should listen to that lesson, learn from it, and pay tribute to the work of our professionals, rather than downgrade them and abuse them every time we speak in the House on a particular case.

Lady Olga Maitland: I congratulate my hon. Friend on developing the community psychiatric nurse programme. Is he aware that there are times when that programme plays a crucial role in rescuing someone who is suffering from mental illness and ensuring that he reaches the appropriate help in time? Does he agree that his programme has now developed fourfold since the Government came to power? That is a far cry from the Labour party, which talked and talked, but did nothing.

Mr. Bowis: My hon. Friend is right—the programme has developed since those days because the Government have made it a priority. My hon. Friend is also right to pay particular attention to psychiatric nurses working in the community and to others who act as the key workers in each case. Every patient who is discharged from hospital care or the mental health services should have a care programme around him or her, monitored and led by the key worker who is often a nurse and who is able to spot things when they are going wrong and alert the necessary professionals to help the individual get through the crisis that he or she may be suffering. If we work towards that end, we shall have a service that is in the best interests of both patients and the wider community.

Community Care

3. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of community care provision. [7493]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): Since April 1993, the Department of Health has monitored the implementation of the community care reforms. In addition, the social services inspectorate carries out regular inspections, statistics are regularly collected and published, and longer-term research is in hand to evaluate the progress of the policy.

Mr. Hardy: While I pay tribute to the dedication of the medical and nursing staff engaged in the sector, would not they—and does not the report of the Royal College of Psychiatrists—point to serious and growing need? May we have an assurance not only that the Government are pledged to maintain supervision, but that they will provide more psychiatric hospital beds and improve staffing to assist those at the sharp end of sometimes horrifying and intensifying need?

Mr. Dorrell: The House can certainly have the assurance that we shall continue to invest to ensure that adequate, up-to-date hospital space is available for those with acute hospital needs who are mentally ill. In addition, we have already announced our intention to introduce a mental health patients charter that will define the standards that patients are entitled to expect from the mental health services. I also announced at the time of the Budget a package that will provide an extra £50 million of new money for the delivery of mental health services. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will welcome those steps.

Mrs. Roe: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the resources that the Government have devoted to all community care services have more than doubled in only five years and have been increased by 9 per cent. this year over last year?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the fast rate of growth in the resources available for the community care of elderly people. Indeed, my hon. Friend understates the scale of the public resources

committed by the Government to care for elderly people. The figure in 1979 was £851 million in total—almost all of it was spent by local authorities. In today's values, that figure is £2.5 billion. The figure that we, local authorities and the Department of Social Security are spending this year is just over £7 billion. There has been an increase, in today's values, from £2.5 billion to more than £7 billion. We have multiplied support by a factor of nearly three.

Mr. Milburn: Does the Minister accept that there is a crisis in public confidence about care in the community policies that has culminated in today's report on the tragic toll of suicides and homicides involving severely mentally ill people? Has not the Government's mismanagement of mental health policy left the NHS in the worst of all possible worlds—with too few beds in hospitals, inadequate facilities in the community and a shortage of trained staff in both? Surely the Minister does not believe that vulnerable people should simply be left to fend for themselves. When will he address the serious shortcomings identified in the report in order to help to avert further tragedies in future?

Mr. Dorrell: In dealing with this subject, the House is dealing with two separate issues: when answering my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) I dealt with community care for elderly people; my answer to the two questions from the Opposition involves community care for the mentally ill. I might have hoped that, when he referred to the confidential report, the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) would draw attention to the fact that it demonstrates that, despite public perceptions to the contrary, there has not been—

Mr. Milburn: That is the point.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman says that the perception is the point. The fact that there has not been an increase in the number of homicides caused by people suffering from mental illness is important. It does not excuse—

Mr. Milburn: One is too many.

Mr. Dorrell: One is too many, of course, but there is no rising trend.

To improve the quality of mental health services, we must first define our objectives. That is why we are setting out a charter to state the objectives. Secondly, we must ensure that the resources flow to deliver the improvement of mental health services that we all want. That is why, at Budget time, I announced an extra £50 million of public money over two years to enhance the resources available to develop mental health services.

Basildon Hospital

4. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were treated at Basildon hospital during the last year. [7494]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam): In 1994-95, there were 49,873 finished consultant episodes—in-patient and day cases—at Basildon and Thurrock General Hospitals NHS trust. In addition, there were 158,552 out-patient attendances.

Mr. Amess: Will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating the hospital on achieving the shortest waiting list time in Essex? Does my hon. Friend agree that Basildon hospital's success in achieving trust status may be judged by the 14 extra consultants employed in the past year, the 35 extra nurses, the opening of a new postgraduate centre, the award of a charter mark for its X-ray services and the 23 per cent. increase in patients treated?

Mr. Horam: I shall not add to my hon. Friend's magnificent list of statistics, for they are all accurate. It is obvious that Basildon has a great hospital as well as a great Member of Parliament.

Mr. Mackinlay: Did the Minister see that the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) recently called for the sacking of the Basildon hospital management? How does the Minister square that with his most recent remarks?

Will the Minister also note that, as a result of the health authority closing the Orsett hospital accident and emergency department in the new Basildon constituency, my constituents in Thurrock and the constituents of Billericay and Basildon must wait five, six or sometimes seven hours in the accident and emergency department of Basildon hospital? Is he proud of that? Does he share the opinion of the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth and me that it is a lousy hospital, which needs to be reformed and differently managed?

Mr. Horam: The hon. Gentleman should bring his facts up to date. The episodes that he complains about were in 1992. They were apologised for at the time—and rightly so; they were extremely regrettable episodes. Those hospitals have reformed their procedures and, since then, put in the performance that I and my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) described.

The hon. Gentleman neglected to mention the fact that Orsett hospital has been reconsidered and will be made into a big community hospital, that a new minor injuries unit will start soon and that day surgery will be retained. In other words, my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon was wrong; the area has two great hospitals, not one.

Mrs. Gorman: May I divorce myself from the derogatory and disgraceful remarks made by the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) about the hospitals in my constituency? I remind the hon. Gentleman, as well as my hon. Friend the Minister, of the wonderful service being done by the Thameside health authority, which covers the community needs of our area. It has recently provided almost 100 new beds for the elderly infirm. They therefore do not block hospital beds in the mainstream hospitals, with the result that we have practically no complaints as sitting Members about bed blocking, which cannot be said for many trusts in Labour-dominated areas.

Mr. Horam: I should have said that not only does the area have two great hospitals, but it has two great Members of Parliament.

Elderly People

5. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the Association of District Councils to discuss the provision of care for elderly people. [7495]

13. **Mr. Olner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the Association of District Councils to discuss community care. [7504]

Mr. Bowis: The Association of County Councils is representing the Association of District Councils on social care matters where district authorities are becoming unitary authorities. We meet it and other local authority associations regularly to discuss community care issues. I last met them on 23 October 1995.

Mr. Marshall: Did those organisations convey to the Minister the concern that many elderly people feel about the cost of long-term care? What will the Government do to reduce the number of people—now about 40,000—who are forced to sell their homes each year? What additional measures do the Government intend to introduce to make the system more equitable and to ensure that that figure is reduced dramatically this year?

Mr. Bowis: The basis of charging policy is exactly the same as it was when it was introduced by the Labour Government in 1948. We have listened to local authority associations and others and we have sought to ease the cost of people's accommodation. That is why we came forward with the proposals on occupational pensions, and it is why my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced decisions in the Budget on capital disregard and consultation about the partnership concept. We are looking for ways to encourage and enable people to prepare for their future care needs.

As the hon. Gentleman will know, our planning is rather different from that of the Labour party. The hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) delivered the verdict on that in his Fabian Society address, in which he said that Labour's health policy

"leaves many important questions unanswered".

He referred to Labour's policy on the long-term care of the elderly as "fudging the issue".

Mr. Olner: Will the Minister confirm that the £16,000 disregard is nothing but a cruel hoax on elderly people, whose homes, on average, are worth about £67,000, as many of them will still lose their homes? Will the Minister say something about the inconsistency of eligibility as between local areas which makes care for the elderly a lottery in many parts of the country?

Mr. Bowis: The question of charging comparisons in different areas does not apply because there is a standard national system of charging. Although there are some areas of discretion for local authorities, they are perfectly open and it is for the elected members of those authorities to decide whether they are fair.

The change has been widely welcomed by organisations that represent the elderly and carers. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would notice not only the rise in the upper limit from £8,000 to £16,000, but the rise in the lower limit from £3,000 to £10,000. That has a significant impact on people who, in the past, were worried about matters such as funeral expenses. That burden has been lifted from their shoulders, which is why the change has been widely welcomed.

Mr. Sims: Does my hon. Friend agree that many local authorities, including mine, have worked very hard to implement community care both in the spirit and in the letter and that it is generally working well? Does he accept also that there is evidence that some authorities do not meet the standard required? Will he confirm that his Department is not only carefully monitoring the implementation of community care but taking steps to elevate those laggard authorities to the standards and the quality of the best?

Mr. Bowis: My hon. Friend is right on both counts. First, there has been a very good start in implementing community care around the country. We always said that it would take a decade to implement it fully. Secondly, he is correct to say that, for a variety of reasons, some authorities are less than good. I fear that that is sometimes due to incompetence and that it is sometimes due to ideological hostility to the use of the independent sector, for example. That fact is borne out by the reports of the independent Audit Commission, not just by my Department's monitoring. The social services inspectorate and the Audit Commission do a great deal of monitoring and we try to follow that up with good practice guidance and by pursuing those authorities that are falling behind.

Mr. Whittingdale: Will my hon. Friend consider what action can be taken against Labour and Liberal-controlled authorities that waste thousands of pounds by insisting on placing elderly people in local authority-run homes rather than those operated by the private sector? Is he aware that, in Essex, that ideological and blinkered policy is wasting £90,000 every week?

Mr. Bowis: I am aware of problems in Essex. As my hon. Friend knows, it is an area that the social services inspectorate is examining. I am aware also that authorities waste money by failing to use the most cost-effective placements. There are two remedies to that: first, there is statutory direction of choice that allows individuals to choose the home of their preference; secondly, district auditors have responsibility for checking value for money. A third response—perhaps it is the ideal solution—is to change the nature of the Essex authority so that it is run by the Conservative party.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: Does the Minister recall that community care was introduced with all-party consent on the basis that elderly people would be able to choose between care in residential homes and their own homes? Did not the Government seriously underestimate the number of elderly people who would make the more expensive choice of living at home rather than in residential homes? How does he intend to ensure that resources match need?

Mr. Bowis: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's support for the policy of community care. It has always been the intention that there should be the maximum choice possible within the resources available in an area. Resources must be taken into account as well. We have been putting massive resources into community care policy. This year, £5.1 billion will go into English local authorities—an increase of 12 per cent. on last year. No one can say that we are not putting our money where our policy is.

Health Funding

6. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of the gross domestic product was

spent on the NHS in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what was the percentage in 1978. [7496]

Mr. Dorrell: National Health Service spending in the United Kingdom as a whole has risen from 4.7 per cent. of gross domestic product in 1978-79 to an estimated 5.7 per cent. in 1995-96.

Sir David Knox: Does my right hon. Friend agree that those figures show clearly the different priorities of Conservative and Labour Governments for the NHS?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is right. The figures show also how right the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) was when he wrote in his paper to the Fabian Society:

"Labour's health policy will not look credible at the General Election if we do not commit ourselves to matching the rate of growth delivered by the Conservatives in recent years."

The hon. Gentleman is precisely right to set our spending as the standard to which the Labour party has yet to rise.

Mr. Bayley: The Secretary of State should read more than the articles that his civil servants dig out. He might have read my recent article in the *New Statesman* in which it was acknowledged that health spending has increased in real terms under the Conservatives, but not as fast as it did under the Labour Government. The real issue is whether all patients in all parts of the country are given equal priority.

The Government have introduced a weighted capitation funding formula for hospital services; why do they not do the same for general practitioner and family health services, given the recent York report that shows that the north of the country and inner-city areas are deprived of GPs when compared with the leafy shires?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman has raised an interesting prospect, which is that the Labour party should commit itself to tearing up the GP national contract. I look forward to hearing that policy endorsed from the Opposition Front Bench.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: The increase in expenditure on the health service by the Government is extremely commendable and I congratulate my right hon. Friend. Does he accept, however, that there is still a problem in community care, which has already been referred to this afternoon? Does he accept that there is a gap in the provision of care between the health service and social services when it comes to the mentally ill and those with behavioural problems? I refer especially to the cases in my constituency of Lynn Fox and Emma Larkins. Lynn Fox was stabbed to death because of the tremendous problems that she was creating for her neighbours. Emma Larkins burnt herself to death. Does my right hon. Friend agree that these things should not occur in a modern, civilised society and that we need to close the gap in the provision of care?

Mr. Dorrell: What my hon. Friend shows is that, not only in the mental health services but across the other services of the health service, expectations of the quality of service that we want to see are rising, and that opportunities to improve the quality of service provided by medical science are rising, too. The Government's spending record has allowed us to reconcile those rising expectations with the resources available.

My hon. Friend can certainly have the assurance that we shall continue to deliver our election commitment: to increase the resources available in real terms to the health service and use them to improve the quality of all the health services, which include the mental health services to which he referred.

Mr. Simon Hughes: If the view of the professionals in the health service and those who speak on their behalf is that there are insufficient resources to ensure that the core services of the NHS—the acute and emergency services—can be comprehensively delivered in the country, what is the explanation? Is it that the NHS, for which the Secretary of State is responsible, is not efficient with its resources? Or is the truth that, although there has been real growth of about 10 per cent. since 1979, there is now barely any, and the next two years will see a cut in real resources to the NHS in real terms for the first time in 25 years?

Mr. Dorrell: Almost every one of the figures that the hon. Gentleman quoted was wrong. He talked about an increase in real resources since 1979 of 10 per cent.; the actual figure is 71 per cent. He talked about a decline in real resources in the years ahead; that is not true, either. I announced before Christmas an increase of 1.6 per cent. in the real spending resources available to the health service next year over this year. That is building on the Government's record since 1979 of demonstrating the priority that they attach to health care by increasing the real resources available to the health service.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Lancaster Acute Hospitals NHS trust has used its share of the increased gross national product to build the most up-to-date hospital in the country, including an overhead X-ray gantry in the resuscitation room, which is linked directly with the X-ray room, and to install—the first in Europe—a digital X-ray system that puts images immediately on to computer, which can be flashed out instantly to general practitioners in other hospitals anywhere in the world?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend referred to the use of capital within the health service. She was quite right to say that, because we have a record capital programme in the health service, we are able to invest in the things to which she referred. There is a problem for the Labour party in the capital programme. We made it clear that we abolished capital rationing in the health service by introducing the private sector through the private finance initiative.

That policy was endorsed by the Leader of the Opposition when he said during the Budget debate:

"The PFI is right in principle."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 1077.]

His health spokesman, the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), said, in my hearing on Saturday morning, "I don't call it the private finance initiative. I call it the privatisation initiative."

Either Labour is in favour of privatising the health service or it is against the PFI—or should be, according to the views of the hon. Member for Peckham. Is the Labour party for or against the PFI? We need to know.

Ms Harman: Will the Secretary of State recognise that, despite his claims about extra resources, many hospitals are so overstretched that they are turning patients away

from their casualty wards and that patients face waits of up to 20 hours on trolleys before they can get a bed? Will he consider my proposals today for a four-point plan to tackle the casualty crisis? Will he declare a moratorium on further bed cuts? Will he appoint someone in each health authority to identify and take action locally? Will he monitor and publish a weekly report on the crisis and issue clear national guidelines to end the uncertainty about who pays for continuing care?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Lady asks for a moratorium on bed cuts to deal with the pressure on the emergency services. Let me tell the House what has happened since the beginning of the year with regard to the availability of beds for emergency cases. An extra 10 beds have been opened in Consett, 26 in Sunderland, 24 in Good Hope hospital in Birmingham, 12 in the West Middlesex, 32 in Newham general, 28 in Chester, 28 in Crewe, 10 in Warrington, 25 in Aintree, and so on. So much for bed cuts. I do not think that the hon. Lady is quite up to date.

Mr. Congdon: I welcome the extra resources that have been put into the NHS, but does my right hon. Friend agree that it is essential that they are used effectively? Does he agree that it is important that health authorities identify the health needs in their area, look at those procedures that are ineffective and ensure that less money is spent on them so that more money can be spent on those procedures that are effective and will deliver improved patient care?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is on to an extremely important point. What we need to do in the health service is to ensure that clinical effectiveness is the test applied by clinicians in making their clinical judgments. That is not controversial within the clinical profession; the profession is committed to delivering it. That is why, when I announced guidelines on the subject last week, I was pleased to have the specific endorsement of representatives of the general practitioner fraternity and the hospital doctors for the important principle that my hon. Friend enunciates.

Private Sector Provision

7. **Ms Corston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has further to involve the private sector in the provision of health services. [7497]

Mr. Malone: We welcome public and private finance working together in health and have long argued for public-private partnerships. I am sure that the hon. Lady tabled her question so that she could express her agreement with that policy.

Ms Corston: Will the Minister confirm that NHS spending on private health care has shot up by 50 per cent. in the past year and that, since the creation of the internal market, £1.5 billion of NHS money has gone on private treatment? Is he also aware that in my constituency people find it increasingly difficult to obtain NHS dental care? They are faced with the stark choice of paying the full cost of private care or taking out private Den plan insurance. When the health service was set up, people were told that dental care would be provided. Why have the Tories broken that promise?

Mr. Malone: I was fascinated to see that the hon. Lady did not take the opportunity to agree with the policy that I set out, for the simple reason that the first clause was in the words of the Leader of the Opposition and the second clause was in the words of the deputy Leader of the Opposition who, conveniently, has just taken his place. The point is simply that the Opposition cannot decide whether they welcome public-private partnerships, which is precisely what the hon. Lady's question is all about. They reject it one day and accept it the next. That is an absolutely ludicrous policy with which to go to the nation. They cannot make up their minds.

Sir John Gorst: Could my hon. Friend give an assurance that he will not be fostering the development of the private sector in the borough of Barnet simply to facilitate the closure of Edgware general hospital's accident and emergency unit?

Mr. Malone: Certainly not. I congratulate my hon. Friend on looking down the Order Paper and anticipating a point that he might have wished to raise slightly later.

Intensive Care Beds

8. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what monitoring he has undertaken of staffing for intensive care beds. [7499]

Mr. Dorrell: It is for health authorities and trusts to determine the level of intensive care provision, including the level of staffing, that is needed by their local populations.

Mr. MacShane: Is the Secretary of State aware of the widespread concern, certainly in Rotherham, and in all other hospitals, at the cuts in intensive care beds? He will have seen the recent British Medical Association report.

I pay tribute to the work done in Rotherham in handling the recent meningitis scare by doctors, the public health authorities and school authorities. But the plain fact is that, when it comes to intensive care beds, there are severe cuts. The Secretary of State may claim that he is a one-nation Tory, but, under him, the NHS is not safe in anyone's hands.

Mr. Dorrell: The problem with the hon. Gentleman's question is that he talked about intensive care bed cuts, including some in his constituency, when the reality is that the Rotherham trust is discussing the commissioning of an extra intensive care bed and of an extra high-dependency bed in Rotherham as well. Opposition Members say that that is happening only in Rotherham, but the figures show that, compared with 1990, an extra 1,000 intensive care nurses are now employed. It simply is not true to say that there is reduced availability of intensive care beds in the national health service. What is certainly true—and this far I will go with the hon. Gentleman—is that we need to ensure that the structures in health service hospitals make the most effective possible use of the expensive resource of intensive care beds. That is why we set up a review to give advice and guidance on precisely that, the report of which I expect will be available shortly.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 16 January. [7521]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Skinner: How on earth can the Prime Minister justify sacking 3,000 prison officers at a time when his Home Secretary has forecast that the prison population will increase, and what will he do with 3,000 extra pairs of handcuffs? Is he going to use them on Lady Thatcher and the bastards in the Cabinet?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. and learned Friend is seeking to ensure that we receive from the Prison Service the efficiency that both we and taxpayers have a right to expect from the Prison Service. The hon. Gentleman may not be concerned about efficiency for taxpayers' money, but we are.

Mr. Trotter: Did not the Saudi Government prove to be stable and sound allies in the Gulf war? Is it not in the interests of Britain that the Saudis should continue to have a stable Government, and has not Mr. Al-Masari abused his position as a guest in this country? Do not the thousands of people whose jobs he puts at risk, especially in the north of England, feel that he is very fortunate to be offered a home on a Caribbean island, rather than being sent back to where he came from?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend will know, the United Kingdom has a long and honourable tradition of protecting and helping people who seek asylum, but if people abuse that hospitality, we should not ignore that. The stability of the Saudi Arabian Government is a matter of importance throughout the Gulf and for stability more generally, and we should not give comfort to people who seek to undermine it.

Mr. Blair: Can the Prime Minister tell us why the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People has been reprimanded for writing his letter to *The Times*?

The Prime Minister: I set out my views on that issue last week and they have not changed.

Mr. Blair: What we would like to know is: has the Minister been reprimanded, yes or no?

The Prime Minister: Matters in my Government are for me and not you.

Mr. Blair: To which I can only say, looking at the Government, thank goodness.

So the Prime Minister cannot tell us. He cannot make up his mind whether he has reprimanded the Minister or not. He cannot make up his mind, presumably, whether he agrees with the Minister, or whether he agrees with Lady Thatcher. Is it any wonder, when the Prime Minister cannot even answer simple questions about his own Government, that the country despairs of weak leadership and a divided Government?

The Prime Minister: While we are on the subject of being clear about views, perhaps the right hon. Gentleman could tell us whether he would renationalise British Rail to please his party, or leave it alone to give his slogan some substance. Let him tell us some more. Would he abolish the grant-maintained schools that he voted against, or would he let parents enjoy the choice that he talks about? Would he tax more successful people to please his left wing, or does he believe that success should be rewarded? Can he make up his mind about any of those examples, and a dozen more that I can give him—or does he not know the answer?

Sir Norman Fowler: Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to congratulate Land Rover on the major new overseas order that was announced this morning, on its continuing success in the overseas market and, above all, on the design of its new military ambulance?

The Prime Minister: Land Rover is an excellent company with a long and honourable record, and I am delighted to congratulate it.

Q2. **Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 16 January. [7522]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Ms Jackson: If, as the Prime Minister claims, his policies have created strong economic growth, why are the appalling 500,000 job losses in the construction industry due—according to the Building Employers Confederation—to rise by a further 22,000? Where will those workers look for jobs, and where will thousands of homeless families look for homes?

The Prime Minister: Let me remind the hon. Lady of some of the economic circumstances—including the fall in unemployment—that now pertain in this country. No significantly sized country in western Europe has as much of its population in work; none of the major European countries has unemployment as low as ours; none of them has seen unemployment fall for over two years; and none of them can combine that with the lowest inflation levels for 50 years, the lowest mortgage rates for 30 years, the lowest basic rate of tax for 50 years and the best prospects that we have seen for many years.

Mr. Marlow: Are more murders, muggings and mindless acts of violence carried out by adolescents now, or were there more in the days when corporal punishment was available both in schools and to the courts? If the answer is now, can we have corporal punishment back? I am sure that many people are concerned about the state of our streets and cities.

The Prime Minister: I do not have the figures immediately to hand, but I can tell my hon. Friend, if he wishes to exercise arguments of that sort, that if he went back far enough and extended his thoughts to capital as well as corporal punishment, he would find that the number of murders committed many years ago when capital punishment applied was far larger than it is now. I am not sure that I draw the conclusion that was implicit in my hon. Friend's question.

Q3. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 16 January. [7523]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Jones: Will the Prime Minister confirm that the average age of a member of the Conservative party is now 62, that there are no more than 5,000 members of the Young Conservatives and that the Young Conservatives'

conference had to be cancelled this year owing to lack of interest? Will he tell us why young people in Britain have lost all interest in the Conservative party, and want nothing to do with it?

The Prime Minister: The answers to the hon. Gentleman's three questions are no, no and no; so the last part of what he said does not apply.

Q4. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 16 January. [7524]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Lady Olga Maitland: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the way to give people a stake in society is to allow them to own their homes, to own shares, to have their own pension schemes and, above all, to pay low taxes? Does he agree that that contrasts sharply with the Labour party's vision of a stakeholding society, which would place burdens on business men and, indeed, bring back vested interests in Labour's old friends?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right in what she says. There has been some discussion recently about the term "stakeholder society" or "stakeholder economy". The Leader of the Opposition now tells us that it is a slogan, and the hon. Member for Brent. East (Mr. Livingstone) tells us that he has not the faintest idea what it means. But we know and have been practising what it means for the past 16 years. It means giving people a direct, personal interest in what happens—lower taxes, more home ownership, more personal pensions—exercised by the holders themselves, not exercised by other people allegedly on their behalf.

Q5. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 16 January. [7525]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Pickthall: Will the Prime Minister look into the case of my elderly constituent, Teresa Stewart, who was referred to Fazackerly hospital by her GP? She arrived there at 4 o'clock in the afternoon but was not seen by a hospital doctor until 10 o'clock that evening. Thereafter, she remained on a trolley until noon the next day. Does not her case, and the hundreds of others up and down the country, demonstrate yet again that the national health service is not safe in the Tories' hands?

The Prime Minister: Of course I will look into the individual case that the hon. Gentleman raises and I will ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health to respond to him. But the hon. Gentleman should realise that, with a service the size of the national health service, he will from time to time find matters of concern. There are now something over 8.5 million patients treated in total each year. The hon. Gentleman might care to consider how much lower that number was when last his party was in government.

Mr. Day: Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to reassure the House that he will not follow the example of the Leader of the Opposition in seeming to imply to the nation that he has rejected everything he has ever believed? Will he also give an assurance that he will never, as Prime Minister and leader of our party, give the impression that he has accepted totally the philosophy of the party that he has fought all his political life? Will he assure Conservative Members of that so that we will not have a similar fear to that of many Labour Members—that the leader of the Labour party is about to cross the Floor and join us?

The Prime Minister: I can certainly give my hon. Friend the assurance he seeks. The Leader of the Opposition seems to base the prospects for his future on the belief that he has always been wrong.

Q6. **Mr. Khabra:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 16 January. [7526]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Khabra: Does the Prime Minister have any new policies to end the recession in the housing market?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman looks, he will see that house prices have risen throughout the past five months. That is a very welcome trend. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) seems neither to understand nor to hear anything that is said to him. I repeat the point—house prices have risen throughout the past five months. That is a welcome development, and I hope and expect to see it continue.

Mr. Legg: Has my right hon. Friend found time to read the latest book by the Labour guru, Will Hutton, especially the chapter entitled "Stakeholder Capitalism"? If my right hon. Friend has read that chapter, does he agree that Labour's vision of stakeholder capitalism owes more to the failed corporatism of the 1970s than to anything happening in Singapore today? Does he have any plans to introduce stakeholder trade unions, which would enjoy extra powers and rights?

The Prime Minister: The distinction between the Government and the Opposition on this matter is that we believe people should have a personal interest, personally owned, in the country. The Opposition seem to believe—if the idea is more than just a slogan, although that is not clear—in a corporatist approach in which special interest groups operate on behalf of the public at large, as the shadow Secretary of State for Transport said just the other day. The Leader of the Opposition, desperately trying to put flesh on his slogan, has failed to do so and has reaffirmed me in my belief that all he is concerned about is the readmission of a corporatist Britain of the sort we rejected in the 1980s and will not have back in the 1990s.

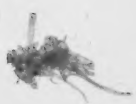
Q7. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 16 January. [7527]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Miller: We are always on the look-out for fresh ideas from the Prime Minister. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] So is his own party. What new plans does he have to increase investment in the British economy?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is certainly right, in that the Opposition have sought, rather inadequately, to borrow many of our ideas—just as they have sought, without real conviction, to ditch their own.

Investment is rising, which is why this country has a higher growth rate than elsewhere in Europe. It is why unemployment is falling; it is why the economy is in better shape at the moment than it has been for many years—and in better shape than the economy of anywhere else in western Europe.



Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. When I raised a point of order with you yesterday about the barbaric practice of shackling pregnant women, I inadvertently referred to the Home Secretary as "odious". Of course, I meant the practice, so I unreservedly withdraw the remark.

Madam Speaker: The House is grateful to the hon. Lady.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I raise this point of order with you on behalf of a number of my hon. Friends who have been in the House for a long time. May we have your guidance on the changing use of personal statements in this House? The Chair must find itself in a very difficult position when a senior Minister asks to make a personal statement—by tradition and definition, a statement not subject to questions, to scrutiny or to challenge at the time of delivery.

As an hon. Member who has, alas, been required himself to make a personal statement, I know that the rules required a Back Bencher to grovel, and a Minister almost always to end up resigning from office. That was the quid pro quo for not being subject to challenge or to questions.

What the House witnessed yesterday was an exercise in self-justification, unchallenged and unchallengeable. If that happens again, the personal statement will become little more than a device for ministerial escape and an unlovely pouring of blame on to civil servants who cannot answer for themselves.

My complaint is the stronger because it would not occur to me to ask questions about women prisoners in England; but some of my colleagues, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), tell me that they would have liked to ask questions.

Should not statements—especially truculently delivered statements—be open to question and not provide a ministerial escape route? This is a House of Commons point, not a party point.

Madam Speaker: I have allowed the hon. Gentleman to make his point in some detail. The House has, however, entrusted me with complete discretion as to whether to allow any Member to make a personal statement. I am quite satisfied that, in allowing the Minister of State, Home Office to give a personal explanation on one strictly circumscribed aspect of the matter in question about which she had previously misinformed the House, and to apologise to the House for so doing, I was not breaking any new ground.

What happened was, incidentally, fully in line with the new version of the document "Questions of Procedure for Ministers", which the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster explained to the House on 2 November last, at column 456. That requires Ministers to correct any inadvertent errors at the earliest opportunity. Nothing which occurred yesterday will prevent Members from pursuing the main issue, or indeed, if they wish, the subsidiary issue, by all parliamentary means available.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. On 25 May 1994, the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) made an unreserved apology to the House for misleading it over tabling amendments to the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. In an extensive article in Sunday's edition of *The Observer*, she not only said that she did not understand why she had had to make an apology, but added that she had had nothing to apologise for. In the same article, she called into question your own involvement at that time.

Is that not discourteous to the Speaker, and is it not within the rights of the House to expect the hon. Lady, to whom I gave ample notice that I was raising this issue and who has just left the Chamber, to make a public apology in which she can explain to the House her change of attitude over the past 18 months on this very serious matter?

Madam Speaker: I have not treated myself to reading the article in full. At the time in question, however, the hon. Lady was of course required by me to apologise to the House, and she did so. I said at the time that her behaviour

"fell below the standards that the House is entitled to expect".—[*Official Report*, 25 May 1994; Vol. 244, c. 342.]

I think that my comments at that time were most pertinent.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Could the House divide on the use of the word "odious" by my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) as regards the Home Secretary?

Madam Speaker: Although I agree that that is a point of order for me, I would need a notice of motion on the Order Paper before allowing that suggestion to proceed.

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Among today's questions to the Secretary of State for Health, I asked about the provision of NHS dentistry as a supplementary to a question about the increase of private provision in the health service. In a long answer, the Minister of State made absolutely no reference to dentistry at all. Is it in order for a Minister to abuse the procedures of the House and not to make any reference at all to the question asked? What action would you propose I take?

Madam Speaker: As the hon. Lady knows, it is not for the Speaker to comment on Ministers' responses. They are responsible for the answers they give. I shall look carefully at the answer to which the hon. Lady has drawn my attention. She will notice that senior Ministers are sitting on the Government Front Bench, and I hope that they will also take note of her comments.

Delegated Legislation

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

ROAD TRAFFIC

That the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Regulations 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 2869) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

That the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) (Fees) Regulations 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 3000) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Question agreed to.

Tobacco (Protection of Children and Restriction of Promotion)

3.38 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to protect children, young people and others from the harmful effects of tobacco by restricting the advertising, sponsorship and promotion of tobacco and tightening existing legislation on enforcement of illegal sales to minors; and for connected purposes.

In the autumn, the British Medical Association produced data which clearly showed that, if one takes the top 10 brands of cigarette advertised and compares the smoking habits of children and adults, three out of the four most heavily advertised brands also figure in statistics of the top four brands smoked by children aged between 11 and 14. It is clear that adults are much less sensitive to tobacco advertising than children. Adults are much more affected by price.

The other extremely pertinent figure showed that the top four brands smoked by children make up over three quarters of all the advertising done by tobacco companies within the United Kingdom. That is also more than those companies had advertised before.

It is now unarguable that tobacco advertising and smoking by children are linked. They are linked in a way which I hope that the Government will accept should be worrying for them. By their own figures, their "The Health of the Nation" targets are not being reached, and attempts to reduce smoking by children are failing. Indeed, smoking by children and young people is going up rather than down. For the first time in over 10 years, over 10 per cent. of teenagers are smoking. The increase in smoking by girls and young women should give the House particular cause to reflect on what we can do about it.

This issue has come before the House several times before, and as long ago as 1965 we agreed that there should be a ban on television advertising. Subsequently, it was agreed that there should be a ban on radio advertising of tobacco products. We should now ban advertising on hoardings or through promotion, particularly by sponsorship of sporting events.

I am happy to approach this in a reasonable manner and say that the legislation could be for a temporary and trial period in order to prove the case—five or 10 years, properly monitored by all those with an interest. The interest is not simply to make a case against the tobacco companies, but to win the argument about protecting the health of vulnerable young people.

It is clear that tobacco sponsorship of sport is a particularly insidious form of advertising. I am a keen follower of sport. I believe that sport should be well promoted and I support the Prime Minister's initiative to promote it, particularly among young people and across the four nations of the United Kingdom. However, research has shown that children as young as six associate brands such as—I will name them—John Player Special and Marlboro, both of which sponsor motor racing, with excitement and fast racing cars.

It is interesting that the images that young children associate with certain brands must have been gleaned from sponsorship of sporting events; that is increasing, with the growing amount of sporting sponsorship by tobacco companies.

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

Tobacco companies are honest about it. They do not pretend that it is a matter of selfless corporate generosity. Somebody from Gallaher said recently:

"Sports sponsorship is a form of advertising which enables us to introduce glamour and excitement."

A spokesman from Rothmans said:

"No one hands over big cheques just to give themselves a warm fuzzy feeling."

There is not a huge amount of tobacco money involved in sports sponsorship—£10 million out of about £250 million. There is no real concern that sponsors could not be found elsewhere. When sponsorship has been sought among other sponsors for sporting events, it has been found and the market has plenty of people willing to take the place of the tobacco companies.

Another unsatisfactory fact is that, although there is supposed to be a law banning the sale of cigarettes to those under 16, in reality it is not working. We all know that, and nobody deludes himself otherwise. A properly monitored and controlled survey carried out last year showed that almost two thirds of young people who had tried to buy cigarettes when they were under the legal age said that they had never been refused. Only 143 people were prosecuted in the last year for which figures are available, and only 85 were fined. In reality, there is very little monitoring or enforcement.

I am not naive about this. I know that three things significantly influence tobacco smoking by young people: adult activity, especially by parents; peer group pressure; and advertising. The second is largely the result of the third: peer group pressure often comes indirectly from advertising. Anyone with children who make demands for trainers and designer tops and clothes will know that demand is much more often led not by instinct but by advertising.

Yesterday, the British Medical Association published the *British Medical Bulletin,* which I commend to the House. It included a considerable number of expert articles edited by people eminent in their fields, which bear out my argument. In particular, it bears out the fact that advertising is one of the ways in which children with low esteem, who are often from backgrounds where smoking is more prevalent, pick up the habit early on.

I do not come to this subject from a nanny state view, or believe that there should be restrictions on adults who smoke. I do not shoo out of my house people who smoke. I do not take a purist or rigorous attitude. However, in respect of young people, for whom we all have a responsibility, the issue is different.

The reason why advertising is so important is because of the clear, unarguable impact on the young. Five out of six people who become regular, adult smokers have begun smoking by the age of 15. The tobacco industry spends about £100 million or more a year on advertising. Expenditure on health promotion to discourage smoking is under £10 million.

That imbalance produces young people who become hooked on what is—there is no dispute in the House about this—the largest single preventable cause of death in the United Kingdom. More than one third of middle-aged deaths are smoking-related, and in many places lung cancer has replaced breast cancer as the most common form of the disease, especially among young women.

Last night, we had an Adjournment debate in which the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) argued that there should be much better publicity for the health risks of Ecstasy; and so there should. Ten people are known to have died in the past year from Ecstasy; 100,000 people have died from tobacco-related disease. It is hypocritical and inconsistent to say that something should be done about Ecstasy, but that we are happy as a nation to go on allowing the tobacco industry, for its own benefit, to promote something to which young people become addicted and which could, or will, kill them.

I know that there is a benefit from tobacco revenues to the Exchequer. I realise that that is one of the reasons for the current position. There are people who regard that as a vested interest that they need to protect. However, I have never seen evidence that there would not be a greater benefit to the Exchequer from cutting the cost to the health service of trying to put back together the broken bodies and lives caused by tobacco-related diseases than from tobacco advertising, which has gone on for far too long.

Children say that they are influenced. There is the broadest support, in every corner of the House, from among Members from each of the countries of the United Kingdom, for the Bill. I pick up from where colleagues such as the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) have been in the past. I ask the House to allow the Bill a First Reading, and to pass it into law, even if only on a trial basis to prove that we are right.

3.48 pm

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): I oppose the Bill, although the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) has, as one would expect, put the argument in a plausible and reasonable manner. Nobody in the House would dispute the fact that every discouragement should be given to try to prevent children from smoking and people from taking up the habit in the first place. Having said that, the hon. Gentleman's Bill goes far wider. He failed to put forward his Bill in several of the examples that he used in regard to promotional activity.

What bothers me is that the Bill is the thin end of a wide wedge. I regret to say that, although the hon. Gentleman told the House that the Bill involved only young people, it is far wider—to the extent that he talks in the Bill about the effect on young people "and others". I must tell him that, plausible though his argument may seem, the facts do not justify the emotion of his argument.

In his Bill, the hon. Gentleman sets out the need to enforce the law against the illegal selling of tobacco. That measure would have the full support of the House. He is right to say that retailers must be urged not to sell cigarettes to people under 16, because that is against the law. He is right to urge local authorities to discourage, and to prosecute, retailers who sell tobacco products to children under the age of 16. He omits to say, however, that the Home Office report, which was published only one year ago, states that the local authorities' success rate in imposing fines and other penalties is more than 90 per cent. That success may not be sufficient in the eyes of the hon. Gentleman and others, but the existing system works.

The Bill bothers me, because it is yet another tranche of legislation intended to add additional measures to the existing agreements between Government and the tobacco

manufacturers, which, as the hon. Member knows, were fought over with difficulty for a long time. Most of the agreements are extremely strict—far stricter than those of the past—and have been reached with the support of all sides of the industry, and the argument.

I am also bothered by the hon. Gentleman's argument about drugs and their illegal use. I should remind him that the BMA report he quoted said that between 10 and 12 per cent. of children try cigarettes between the ages of 11 to 15. He is right to say that that 10 to 12 per cent. may represent too many children. He did not mention, however, that a report from Leicester university, which was issued on the same day as the BMA report, suggests that one in four children under the age of 15—or 25 per cent.—try drugs.

It does not befit the hon. Gentleman to use the drugs argument when, two years ago, his party conference suggested that cannabis should be legally used, inevitably by young people. Of course that embarrasses the hon. Gentleman, but I think that his Bill, his wrath and his indignation are directed at the wrong quarter.

The premise of the hon. Gentleman's argument is that advertising attracts young children to smoking. I am a non-smoker, although I will not say that I have never touched the weed, because I had the odd one behind the hedge at school, many years ago. It is a total mystery to those of us who are non-smokers how he can tell the House that 14 or 15-year-olds are influenced by cigarette advertising. It has been proven that those advertisements are used purely to attract existing smokers to different brands. That is a flaw in his argument.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned Marlboro cigarettes, and said that six-year-olds were influenced by those advertisements. I must confess that I did not know that six-year-olds have started buying cars—although possibly in a Liberal world they should be allowed to do so. I know that the Liberals want the age of driving reduced. The hon. Gentleman and his friends—apart from the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy), who I see is not in his place today, but who wrote an excellent article some three weeks ago decrying the hon. Gentleman's argument—are advocating a nanny state.

The problem with this Bill, as with any such intended legislation, is that it totally ignores the real world. The Liberals want to see the creation of a nanny state, which stops people doing something that they want to do. The Liberals are hiding behind the subject of children. The hon. Gentleman does not mention that, under the existing agreement, it has been agreed not to erect poster sites within three miles of schools; not to place advertisements in young people's magazines; and that there should be no such thing as glamour advertisements, which might attract the young.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that everything should be done to discourage young people from smoking. As he said, however, the pressure to smoke comes from peer groups and from brothers and sisters.

The Bill, should it receive the approval of the House, is totally unnecessary because of existing legislation. What a pity that the hon. Gentleman has chosen to take up the time of the House on something that is totally unnecessary, and based on pure emotion rather than pure fact.

I therefore urge my hon. Friends to reject this stupid and illogical Bill, not merely on the basis of liberty and fairness, but because the hon. Gentleman's remarks are not borne out by the facts—his Bill will do nothing to help to protect the young children of whom he talks.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 158, Noes 39.

Division No. 23] **[3.54 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benton, Joe
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fabricant, Michael
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Flynn, Paul
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, Jerry
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Janner, Greville
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McCrea, The Reverend William
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan

Sims, Roger
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sweeney, Walter
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and
Mr. Don Foster.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bendall, Vivian
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cummings, John
Dover, Den
Duncan Smith, Iain
Durant, Sir Anthony
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Gardiner, Sir George
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hawksley, Warren
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Hicks, Robert
Hunter, Andrew
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Mills, Iain
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Neubert, Sir Michael
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Riddick, Graham
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Peter Atkinson and
Mr. Harry Greenway.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Simon Hughes, Sir Peter Emery, Mr. Kevin Barron, Mrs. Edwina Currie, Ms Tessa Jowell, Mr. Roger Sims, Ms Liz Lynne, Mr. Hugh Bayley, Mr. Dafydd Wigley, Rev. Martin Smyth, Mr. Eddie McGrady and Mr. Andrew Welsh.

Tobacco (Protection of Children and Restriction of Promotion)

Mr. Simon Hughes accordingly presented a Bill to protect children, young people and others from the harmful effects of tobacco by restricting the advertising, sponsorship and promotion of tobacco and tightening existing legislation on enforcement of illegal sales to minors; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 16 February and to be printed. [Bill 12.]

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will know that, in recent months, I have repeatedly raised with you, both on the Floor of the House and in correspondence, the question of the role of the Deputy Prime Minister. As I understand it, he is currently responsible for deregulation and the co-ordination of Government policy.

The publication of the unemployment figures is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, and they are due to be announced tomorrow. I draw your attention to a statement made by the Deputy Prime Minister this morning at the Pilkington technology centre in Lancashire, in which he announced that the real news of today is that unemployment is down for the 28th month in a row. I remind Government Members that the figures are fiddled, but that is a matter for another day.

The central argument is the responsibilities of the Deputy Prime Minister. He is now usurping the responsibilities of the Secretary of State for Education and Employment by announcing the figures 24 hours in advance, and probably without her permission.

Madam Speaker: I cannot be responsible for what Ministers say in the House, and I am certainly not responsible for what Cabinet Ministers say outside the House. Ministers' duties and responsibilities are a matter for the Prime Minister, and I hope that the comments of the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) will be brought to his attention.

Opposition Day

[1ST ALLOTTED DAY]

BBC World Service

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Prime Minister.

4.8 pm

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): I beg to move,

That this House congratulates the BBC World Service on its international reputation for objective news and comment and records its appreciation of the valuable contribution it makes to promoting respect and goodwill for Britain; expresses its concern at the effects of cuts imposed on the World Service and its alarm at the likely reduction in the range of foreign language broadcasts; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to ensure that policies on the Private Finance Initiative and public support for the World Service enable it to maintain its present level of services and to build on their success.

I am conscious of a novel experience. On Supply days it is normal to move a motion that divides the House. I think that I can say that on this occasion there is much in the motion that unites the House. It is agreed in all corners of the House that the BBC World Service is a great British success. It is by far the largest of any of the external broadcasting services of the western nations. Its audience is still rising. In the past three years, it has risen from 120 million to 133 million. The audience would be larger still if there were not uncounted millions in places such as China and Iraq. We cannot be certain whether they listen to the World Service, because were they to be asked and were they to say yes, they would be liable to be put in prison.

In a now notorious speech, the Secretary of State for Defence assured the Conservative party conference that the letters SAS were feared throughout the world. If there is a British organisation that is known by three letters round the globe, it is surely the BBC. They are letters that inspire not fear for Britain but respect, admiration and good will. It would be difficult for the Foreign Secretary to name any way in which he could spend his money that would give him a better return on a positive environment for good will towards Britain.

I know of one letter that has been sent to the Foreign Secretary by a listener in Africa, which expresses the point well. The letter reads:

"The BBC World Service is the diplomat who can enter the rural home, the urban business centre, the civil servant's office and the country hospital ward."

It is for that reason that Members on both sides of the House support the World Service. It deserves also the support of all parties. The World Service demonstrates in practice our democratic values, including truthful reporting, independent comment and all the other features on which an open society must be based. As a result, the World Service provides a beacon for countries with regimes that suppress truth and independent comment.

When the Burmese opposition leader emerged from years of house arrest to claim her Nobel prize, she said:

"The BBC World Service really was a lifeline."

When Nelson Mandela emerged from prison, he said that what he really wanted in prison was a receiver that would enable him to listen to the World Service. As his name reminds us, the dissident of today is the leader in power tomorrow. It is impossible to exaggerate the influence for Britain of the politicians throughout the world who have come to rely on the BBC for their independent news.

We all recognise the importance of the World Service. Both sides of the House are agreed on its value. Even more unusually, both sides of the Tory party are agreed. It is one of those issues around which Euro-sceptics and one-nationers can find common cause. Even Ministers agree with us. Last week, the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office recognised the

"great value and high quality"—[*Official Report*, 10 January 1996; Vol. 269, c. 201.]

of the World Service. This morning, the Foreign Secretary described it as "superb value". If superlatives would pay wage cheques, the World Service would be on the verge of major expansion. Instead, its executive met this weekend to consider where it would cut services.

The real crisis that the executive faces will come in 1997-98, when the revenue budget—the one that pays for the services that it provides—will be reduced. The Foreign Secretary has written to the World Service saying that it can expect a cut in 1997-98 of £2.5 million. That will be on top of a cut of £2 million in the same year's budget, which was imposed in November 1994.

Those cuts cannot be replaced by the private finance initiative because they are cuts in the operating budget. It may be that the Foreign Secretary is right and that cuts in the capital budget can be replaced by the private finance initiative.

Perhaps somebody will come forward and build a new transmitter in Oman and lease it back to the BBC World Service. I would, in passing, express a worry about the commercial relationship that that would create. I am concerned that it might compromise the most prized and respected quality of the BBC World Service—the independence of its editorial comment and its freedom from external pressures, whether political or commercial.

This month, we were reminded of the risks of such a commercial relationship when BBC World Service Television bulletins covering the expulsion of Muhammad al-Masari, which were broadcast to the middle east, were disrupted at the transmitter in Italy, which, of course, is funded from the middle east. That example shows the potential conflict between commercial funding—I presume that the Foreign Secretary does not exclude foreign funding—and the freedom of the BBC World Service to broadcast without interference.

For the purposes of the debate, I offer a deal to the Foreign Secretary. I shall not object to the private finance initiative as a source of capital funding for the World Service if he stops pretending that the PFI will solve the financial pressures on it, because if the World Service is successful and manages to get the PFI money, that will not solve the pressures on its operating budget. Indeed, it will increase the pressures because the BBC World Service will have to find extra cash to pay the bills for leasing the transmitter.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): The hon. Gentleman will know that I agree with much of what he has said, as I worked many years ago for the BBC World Service and I still have some connections with the BBC. In total, the cut amounts to around 1 per cent. of the BBC World Service's operating budget. Will he now give a

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firm commitment to restore that 1 per cent. and say how much would be allocated to the BBC World Service in grant in aid if there were a Labour Government?

Mr. Cook: I have already answered the thrust of the hon. Gentleman's question several times today. *[Interruption.]* If Ministers will be quiet, I shall repeat what I said before: that I give an undertaking that, under the next Labour Government, which, I hope, will be with us in 1997, we shall maintain the present level of language broadcasts by the BBC World Service. The hon. Gentleman's figure is wrong. The total cut in the operating budget of the World Service is about 8 per cent. Yet that is less than 1 per cent. of the budget of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which is spending £77 million this year on management consultants—almost half the total budget of the BBC World Service. Is that really better value for money than putting money into the BBC World Service?

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): The hon. Gentleman has repeated to the House what he said on the radio this morning: that he was prepared on behalf of a future Labour Government to commit them not to cut the language services of the BBC World Service. He has, however, declined to give an assurance that he would replace any reduction in resources that might have been implemented. The only way in which one can reconcile those statements is on the basis that the hon. Gentleman accepts that, through better value for money, the BBC should be able to maintain its existing language services without the restoration of the cuts, otherwise he would be committing himself to such a restoration, and he is not prepared to do that.

Mr. Cook: The Secretary of State followed me on the radio this morning and said that it was not his wish to cut the language services. I do not understand, then, the problem that he is putting before us. If I was confronted by BBC World Service executives saying that they could not provide those language services on the present budget, I would go back and look at the £77 million that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office was spending on management consultants and ask how much of that could be put into the World Service.

We have a Government who can always find the money that they want for their political priorities. They are currently spending £1 billion on privatising the rail service. They are spending £1 billion more a year on extra bureaucracy in the NHS to make the reforms work. One per cent. of either of those sums would fully fund the BBC World Service and do much more good for Britain than either objective.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Before my hon. Friend moves on, is not it the case that the Labour party has a long tradition of supporting the BBC World Service, whereas the Government have a patchy record? I remember, when I was first in the House, when the Government wanted to cut the language service to Latin America—to Argentina in particular—because it was not necessary any more, just before the Falklands conflict. That is the sort of long-term view that the Conservative Government have of the BBC World Service. Every time that they are in a bit of a squeeze, they want to cut the BBC World Service.

Mr. Cook: I press home my hon. Friend's point by turning to the point that the Secretary of State was leading us on to about value for money.

We are not dealing with an overweight organisation in which the savings can be found by a crash course in slimming. The BBC World Service has already been through three lean years. Its operating budget has already been slimmed by 8 per cent. during those past three years. In that time, it has implemented many of the recommendations of the National Audit Office. In the same month in which the Government revealed the cuts, the National Audit Office published a second report in which it praised the World Service for an "improvement in management performance" and significant strides forward.

I hope that, against that background of an efficient organisation that has already made major savings, the Foreign Secretary, when he comes to speak, will treat hon. Members as adults and not continue with the pretence that the cuts in grant aid do not matter because no service will be affected.

I heard also this morning the managing director of the BBC World Service tell the nation that the cuts will mean cuts in services—cuts so significant that it would be wrong to try to meet them by salami slicing, but which would have to be met by dropping whole discrete services. That is why, on Sunday, the executive of the World Service met to consider which languages could be dropped from its portfolio if those cuts went ahead in 1997.

I repeat the question that the Secretary of State failed to answer last week. If Ministers were at that conference, which languages would they drop to save the £10 million? This, after all, is the moment in history when the European Union is opening its doors to central and eastern Europe. The Governments of those countries will take part in joint decisions that will affect the lives of our citizens. This is not the time when we should be reviewing broadcasting in Czech, Polish or Hungarian.

I shall be frank with the House. The House needs to pay attention to the very real possibility that enlargement of the European Union may strengthen the hand of Germany, which already has substantial influence in that region of Europe. One of the strongest cards that Britain has in its hand is that the BBC World Service is listened to by 10 times the audience of its German rival. That gives us tremendous access to influence and good will. We should be guaranteeing, not threatening, the future of those programmes.

If central Europe is not the place for cuts, where else in the world might they be made? During the past few months, both sides of the House have joined in an enjoyable debate on the lessons that the tiger economies hold for Britain. We differ on what those lessons might be, but I think that we are agreed on the exciting growth of those economies as markets for British trade. Is this the time to be reviewing whether we should supply the Mandarin service that goes to Taiwan or the services to the younger tiger economies of Indonesia, Burma and Thailand? If we drop any of those, at what cost to British trade do we make the saving in public spending?

The Foreign Secretary will know that British companies and British business leaders, from Standard Chartered to Unilever, have written to him opposing the cuts because the BBC World Service opens doors to business by creating a favourable image of British standards.

In my current portfolio, I am obliged to accept Governor Patten as above party politics. Therefore, I shall seize this opportunity of agreeing with him. When he was here last October and gave his lecture on the tiger economies, Governor Patten, speaking of the BBC World Service, said:

"It is worth every penny of public money it receives."

That is true—true not just in that it backs the influence of British diplomacy, but true also in that every penny put into the BBC World Service produces pounds in British trade and probably also pounds in inward investment into Britain. I do not therefore rest my case on altruism. The case for the House backing the BBC World Service rests on British self-interest, because it gives us a source of political leadership and diplomatic influence, and it is the basis of the trade expansion on which our economy thrives or fails.

The BBC World Service also, however, provides valuable support for humanitarian relief and for economic development. In Rwanda and Serbia, it provided a missing person link line, which has brought together parents and children separated in different refugee camps. In eastern Europe, the World Service has provided programmes as part of the Marshall plan of the mind, which has helped the populations of the former communist countries come to terms with modern technologies and market economies. If the debate is to be, as the Foreign Secretary seems to suggest, about value for money, I should like to hear what better value he could get in helping the people of those regions than by investing through those services.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): I have listened closely to the hon. Gentleman's argument and criticisms. Will he clearly tell the House how much extra he and the Labour party believe should be given to the World Service to fulfil the tasks that he has outlined?

Mr. Cook: The irony of the right hon. Gentleman's question is that the BBC World Service is asking not for extra money, but for its budget not to be cut. It could live even within a stable budget after the 8 per cent. cuts of the past three years. If we want the BBC World Service to build on its success, surely the least that we can offer it is the stability and security of the assurance that that budget will continue.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: I will, but this must be the last occasion, as many hon. Members wish to speak.

Mr. Arnold: Bearing it in mind that the real increase in spending on the BBC World Service since 1979, during the years of the Conservative Government, is 50 per cent., what was the real increase in spending, if any, by the Labour Government on the service?

Mr. Cook: I understand that it is now permissible for Opposition Members to put in a good word for Lady Thatcher, and I would concede that she carried through a major expansion of World Service resources because she had a proper grasp of its importance in world affairs. That has not been the story in this Parliament, when BBC World Service resources have gone down by 8 per cent. It is now faced with another 8 per cent. cut in the next two years. I do not wish to take sides on Lady Thatcher's general observation that the Government are letting down the Thatcherite legacy, but on this point, they are certainly letting down the record that she left behind.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Answer the question.

Mr. Cook: I have answered the question of the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) in that, in this Parliament, the Government are cutting the World Service's budget.

Mr. Arnold *rose—*

Mr. Cook: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to press me again on a point on which, I believe, central office has briefed him, I shall tell him—because I was here at the time and he, I think, was not—that, despite difficult economic circumstances, and the fact that we had not a penny in oil revenues and did not sell off any of the nation's industrial assets, the previous Labour Government managed to maintain the services of the World Service and the resources going into it.

I shall give this advice to the hon. Gentleman, and judging by his majority, he needs it. He may want the Government to escape from the trap in which they now lie in the opinion polls, where they are perceived as being out of touch by 85 per cent. of the population, but he will only confirm that perception, if every time people ask him how we solve a problem in 1997, he wants to talk only about 1977. If he wants to go to his constituency and talk from now until polling day about the 1970s, I warn him that that will suit us perfectly because it will restore neither his electoral fortunes nor the funding of the BBC World Service.

Mr. Arnold *rose—*

Mr. Cook: I will not give way.

I shall now return to the problems. I was describing the services provided to countries where we provide humanitarian relief. The people of those countries have no doubt about the value to them of those services. For that matter, other countries that maintain external broadcasts have no doubt about the value to them of such services. The Government of France will be increasing the budget of RFI, the French international broadcasting service, by an eighth in the same year that we shall cut the BBC World Service budget by 8 per cent.

The Foreign Secretary has said that he does not wish any language service to be closed. If he really does not, I cannot understand why he does not accept the motion, because that is its central demand. We could set a new precedent in parliamentary procedure: this could be the first occasion on which the Government accepted an Opposition Supply day motion.

If the Foreign Secretary is serious—if he really wishes to keep the present language service—he must answer one question. What will he say if the BBC World Service tells him, "We are sorry, but we cannot make the savings for which you have asked without cutting services"? Will he be willing to look again at the funding for 1997 to ensure that language services can be continued?

Mr. Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster): He has already said that.

Mr. Cook: No, he has not. That, however, is the key question that the Foreign Secretary must answer in the House—and I warn him that he must not evade it by saying that he agrees that the British World Service is a great success. The more the Government tell us that it is

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a great success, the more incomprehensible it becomes that they are not prepared to build on that success by backing it.

The BBC World Service is a great national asset, and those who work in it provide a quality of service that does Britain credit. They are entitled to know that they have the confidence of the House. I urge all hon. Members to use today's debate and tonight's vote to express their support for the work of the BBC World Service and their recognition of its immense value, and to demand that the Government give a commitment tonight that the present level of services will be maintained and will not be cut.

4.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"congratulates the BBC World Service on its international reputation for objective news and comment and records its appreciation of the valuable contribution it makes to promoting respect and good will for Britain; expresses its welcome for the 50 per cent. growth in real terms of its resources since 1979 as well as the significant increase in foreign language broadcasts over the same period; and shares Her Majesty's Government's determination to ensure that the World Service will continue to enjoy unrivalled success.".

I know that many Back Benchers on both sides of the House are long-standing devotees of the World Service, who have given it unstinting support for many years. I intend to concentrate on responding to any worries that they may have, and assuring them that the World Service will have a future as glorious as its current excellent position.

I hope that I was forgiven a wry smile as I observed the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) trying to don the mantle of a champion of the World Service. Like his hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), he implied that the Labour party—as opposed to individual Labour Members—had given good service to the BBC over the years. I must remind him and also the House that he, too, will be judged not by his words but by his deeds.

Like me, the hon. Gentleman was in the House in the 1970s; like me, he remembers clearly what happened under the Labour Government of 1974-79. He recalls the stagnation that affected the World Service throughout that period, and the 7.7 per cent. cut in its resources that was made in the final year of that Government.

We also remember the capital allocations that were available. I shall not detain the House long as I wish to deal with the present position, but we need to put the facts on the record. In 1977, the central policy review study concluded:

"Because of public expenditure constraints in the UK, the BBC has not been able to modernise its transmitters sufficiently fast to keep up with its international competitors. As a consequence, there has been a decline in the audibility of its programmes, and an extensive capital programme is now needed to restore that audibility".

That was the position when the present Government came to office. Now let us consider what has been achieved under the Conservative Government. First, let us compare the stagnation during Labour's term of office, when there was zero growth, with the growth—50 per cent. in real terms—that the present Government have secured for the World Service. In contrast with the failure to fund the BBC's capital requirements glaringly identified by the central policy review staff two years before the end of the Labour Government, we have presided over a capital programme of no less than £166 million, which was completed in 1991. That is why the BBC has expanded in the dramatic way that it has. Since then, we have continued the work on a new relay station in Thailand as part of a future programme of work.

Mr. Fabricant: Does my right hon. and learned Friend realise that whereas a BBC internal estimate in the 1970s suggested that more than half the land mass of the world could not receive any BBC transmissions, now more than 90 per cent. of the world can receive BBC on short wave? Most of the world is also covered in stereo by satellite transmission. That has happened since the Government have been in power.

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is entirely correct. The figures reflect that fact graphically. When the Labour Government left office, the number of people who listened to the BBC World Service was 75 million. The hon. Member for Livingston paid tribute in his speech to the fact that the number now listening has increased from 75 million to 133 million. He should reflect on the fact that the BBC World Service—thanks to the investment programme funded by the Government—now has more listeners than any of its competitors; indeed, it has more than double the number of listeners of its nearest competitor.

If the hon. Member for Livingston wished to be as objective as his rhetoric implied, he should have paid tribute to the achievements of the BBC World Service under the Conservative Government. Those achievements have continued during this Parliament. The hon. Gentleman implied that the period of expansion somehow ceased in 1992, but that was incorrect. In the past four years, no fewer than four new language services have been introduced. In 1992, Ukrainian was introduced for the first time. In 1993, Albanian was re-introduced, having been withdrawn in 1967 under a Labour Government. In 1994, we introduced a language service for Rwanda, because of the tragedy in that country. In December 1995, we introduced Macedonian.

I heard the hon. Member for Livingston muttering about the French for Europe service. He knows perfectly well that that service was withdrawn by the BBC World Service, not for public expenditure survey reasons, but because the target for people listening to the programme had not been met. The BBC therefore decided, for its own understandable reasons, that the service was not good value for money.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The Secretary of State claimed "we introduced" a new service for Rwanda, implying that the Government had done so. Is he aware that funding for the Rwanda service does not come from grant aid but is provided by a number of non-governmental organisations?

Mr. Rifkind: I am informed that it is funded through the BBC World Service, which is funded by the Government. We could have a splendid discussion on that subject, but the fundamental point is that a significant number of additional languages have been introduced by the BBC World Service during this Parliament. That should be warmly applauded.

I have made those points because the Government have been responsible for the largest ever expansion in the capital programme and in the number of listeners to the BBC World Service. It is unlikely, therefore, that we would now be contemplating reversing those achievements or preventing the BBC World Service from maintaining the high standards that it has achieved. What we are doing—and I make no apology whatever for it—is expecting the BBC, like any other international organisation, with regard to both capital and current expenditure, to seek efficiency through use of the private sector and other means so as to reduce the burdens on the taxpayer, but without reducing the successful language services that have been expanded under the Government.

That is the framework of our policy. I notice that the hon. Member for Livingston, in the words of the motion, in his interview this morning and in his speech, did not dare to disassociate himself from value for money as a desirable objective, or from the private finance initiative as a desirable way to achieve value for money. If the hon. Gentleman accepts that that is a legitimate objective, he is using weasel words when he condemns the Government for proposing such a reform.

Mr. Robin Cook: This morning the Foreign Secretary heard the managing director of the BBC World Service say that he cannot meet these cuts by value for money or efficiency savings. If the managing director is still taking that view after he has completed his review of the funding for 1997-98, will the Foreign Secretary be prepared to provide the resources necessary to preserve the current 42 language services?

Mr. Rifkind: I shall come to that, but first I wish to quote for the record the formal position of the BBC. The chairman of the BBC acknowledges that the World Service

"cannot be seen in isolation from the totality of the budget".

The managing director, Mr. Younger, has said that the World Service

"will be taking a fresh look at the scope for further efficiency savings in our operations."

I welcome the fact that he added in respect of the capital programme:

"We are already looking positively at how the Private Finance Initiative can be applied to our capital plans and I am hopeful that we can make significant progress."

The formal statement that the BBC issued did not say that cuts were inevitable or even likely. I have the document before me and I have looked at it rather carefully. The BBC said:

"if we are not successful, there will inevitably be a reduction in our range of programme services."

The chairman of the BBC said:

"I am worried lest these proposed cuts will have a greater effect on our service than is immediately apparent".

The deputy director general said:

"I am deeply anxious at any cuts which might threaten damage to programme services".

So the BBC is not saying at this moment that cuts are inevitable; it is expressing its understandable concern. Time will tell. Certain of my remarks today will reassure the BBC that the damage will not happen.

Mr. Cook: The Foreign Secretary has paraded a range of quotations expressing grave concern on the part of BBC executives. I repeat my question to him: if they are not successful, and if they return to the Foreign Secretary saying that they have been unable to meet the cuts by efficiency savings, will he consider again the funding necessary to maintain the 42 language services?

Mr. Rifkind: I shall come to that in my own time. The hon. Gentleman says that the BBC has expressed concern at the reduction in resources given to it. He knows perfectly well that there is no organisation known to man—in the public or private sectors, the Labour party or the Conservative party—which does not express concern when its resources are reduced. That is the human condition. No one welcomes a reduction in resources. If the stewardship of the nation's financial resources is ever entrusted to the Labour party, and if it responds to every expression of concern by assuming that that concern is justified and therefore more resources have to be provided, God help the taxpayer.

We have a duty not to accept automatically all expressions of concern, but to look at them sympathetically and sensitively. We need to discuss them with the BBC to determine whether the concerns are justified and to see whether there are ways of making do with slightly reduced resources. Then we must come to a final decision on the implications.

The BBC has made it clear—on the radio this morning, for instance—that it is not particularly worried about next year. It is concerned about 1997-98 and beyond—on the basis of current planning figures. As the BBC has rightly said, what happens then depends partly on how many efficiency savings it can achieve and on the rate of inflation. None of us can be certain about either factor in future years. Thus there is clearly a great deal of hypothetical discussion, although it is only right and proper that such debate should take place.

Like the hon. Member for Livingston, I would say that we have no intention of removing successful language services. Indeed, I can go further and tell the hon. Gentleman that the evidence that we have suggests that life will be considerably easier for the World Service than is feared. The reasons for that flow from Government policies.

The major changes that we have asked the BBC to consider are on the capital side. We have asked it to identify alternative methods of funding, via private finance, totalling £22 million over three years. I am pleased to tell the hon. Member for Livingston that on the basis of accumulating evidence it appears that there is scope for about £30 million of private finance funding for the World Service's capital programme. That means that the service will probably not just meet the target that we have set it without damaging its capital programme but will more than meet it.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West) *rose—*

Mr. Rifkind: If the hon. Gentleman will just restrain himself, I will give way to him later.

I come next to the specific question that the hon. Member for Livingston asked me and in which I know that my hon. Friends are interested. It arises out of what may prove to be the greater than anticipated success of the Government's private finance initiative. Both the Chief Secretary and I would look sympathetically at providing the flexibility to allow resources to be moved into

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programmes, assuming that the PFI is successful. In other words, there will be flexibility because the Government's policy looks like being even more successful than the target that we gave the BBC. That is exactly what we would have hoped for, and it should reassure the House.

Mr. Banks: I find this intriguing. The right hon. and learned Gentleman suggests that the private finance initiative will somehow produce free money which does not have to be paid for. How is the World Service to pay for it? The money will have to be paid for in terms of interest payments, leasebacks and so on, out of operating costs. We know that the World Service will already be suffering from a significant £8.6 million reduction in operating costs, so how will it afford to pay for the PFI?

Mr. Rifkind: The service will not be suffering a £8 million reduction in operating costs. There will be no such reduction in years one or three. In year two, there will be a £2.5 million consideration on top of the £2 million—a problem that can be resolved by a combination of greater efficiency and moving money from capital to current costs if the capital savings turn out higher than expected. The BBC is also actively pursuing a number of other ways of resolving the problem.

I noted that the hon. Member for Livingston—despite many requests from the radio interviewer this morning and from my hon. Friends today—refused point blank to give any commitment that any future Government in which he might be involved would increase or restore the cash allocated to the World Service. He took refuge in a general statement about not being prepared to see any successful language service removed. That showed that he clearly believes that there is scope, through efficiency and other means, to preserve the services. That is a powerful admission.

Mr. Robin Cook: Judging from what the right hon. and learned Gentleman has told the House today, he himself is not convinced that the savings can be met by efficiency or any other means; otherwise, he would not have outlined the new proposals for the World Service, which I welcome.

This debate will be justified only if the Foreign Secretary agrees that he is now saying that if the BBC World Service exceeds its target for the PFI, it can transfer that capital into revenue. Does he agree that that, in effect, is to concede that the BBC has made the case for more revenue support?

Mr. Rifkind: No, I am saying that there are a number of ways whereby we can ensure that the language services are maintained—one of them being greater efficiency. If, as now seems quite possible, the BBC more than meets its PFI targets, that will provide another means of ensuring the outcome that we all want without increasing public expenditure. The Government have every intention of being flexible; we have presided over the greatest ever expansion of the World Service and we are hardly likely to want to reverse that.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Do I infer from what my right hon. and learned Friend has said that he is confident that neither the range of language services nor the breadth of those services—including the vital English language services—is in jeopardy? Is he further saying that if there should be a problem, he will be prepared to look at it with great sympathy and do what he can to help?

Mr. Rifkind: Yes, I can give that absolute assurance. I am very relaxed about giving it because it coincides entirely with the priority that I personally and the Government as a whole attach to the importance of the World Service and our determination not to damage the very high standards that it has achieved under our stewardship.

Mr. Temple-Morris: Following on from interventions on this central question, may I welcome what my right hon. and learned Friend has said about the private finance initiative? We all welcome that finance; however, at present it is planned, targeted, hopeful, but not definite. Were it not to be as successful as we all hope, and my right hon. and learned Friend has to address the concern expressed in the Opposition motion—the likely reduction in the range of foreign language broadcasts without expecting hope or help from the PFI—with regard to the next triennium, which is of crucial concern to us all, will my right hon. and learned Friend approach the matter with an absolute determination to preserve those foreign language services?

Mr. Rifkind: That is indeed the Government's position and I am happy to state it. We have provided the figures for next year and the BBC has said that it is generally content with them. This debate is about how much it is reasonable to assume might be available for future years through greater value for money and the private finance initiative. The final figures for future years are not yet determined. The figures determined relate to next year and the BBC has said that they do not present a significant problem; it is very relaxed about them.

The BBC has expressed concern about what might happen from 1997 onwards. The final figures for 1997 will be determined next year in the public expenditure survey round. Much more will be clear then than is possible to determine at the moment about the precise sums that might be available through the PFI and any other achievements from greater efficiency.

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): The Foreign Secretary seems to have conceded today that the World Service needs additional money. His civil servants conceded that fact five months ago, when they agreed in the joint capital spending review that it should receive an additional £5 million. What has happened since then, other than the Budget and the Government's long-term election prospects, to change that view to require the World Service funding to be financed through the PFI? What is the difference between now and August for the Foreign Secretary?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman will know that the Government have been interested in using private finance for public sector programmes for more than the past five months. The outcome of the previous PES round was a major programme of private finance, which applied to all Departments. What I am saying today does not contemplate an increase in the total resources being provided for the BBC. What I said with regard to the private finance initiative was that it appeared that even more of the programme than had been anticipated looked like being able to be financed other than through the

taxpayer, and that that could allow a flexibility between the BBC's capital and current obligations, which would make it even easier for it to carry out its operating tasks?

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): Before leaving the question of private funding and the very high standards of journalism and editorial integrity for which the BBC has become famous, what can the Foreign Secretary tell us about the Government inquiry—which I presume must be going on—on the compromising through negligence by the BBC of its editorial independence through the commercial relationship with the private company Orbit Communications operating in Rome and broadcasting BBC World Service Television pictures to the middle east? The Foreign Secretary will know that the middle east has been repeatedly blacking out broadcasts from this country which carry news and film about the Government's deportation of the Saudi dissident Al-Masari. It is a critical matter for the Government, for the BBC and for standards of journalism in this country. Will the Foreign Secretary deal with it at this stage?

Mr. Rifkind: I do not know of any evidence which suggests that the BBC has in any way compromised its editorial independence. I do not believe that the BBC would for one moment contemplate doing so. If the hon. Gentleman has any allegations to the contrary, he must provide the hard evidence and not just generalised allegations. Moreover, that is not a matter to put directly to me. He obviously must put that to the appropriate quarter to be properly investigated. I have seen no such evidence.

Mr. Tim Renton (Mid-Sussex): I remember discussions between my right hon. and learned Friend and myself about the importance of the BBC World Service when we were both Ministers of State at the Foreign Office some years ago. It is clear that all hon. Members have come to the House today to praise the BBC World Service and not to bury it. It would, however, be helpful to the House if my right hon. and learned Friend would explain how he envisages the £30 million from the PFI being used. It is obviously very helpful to know that there could be £30 million available, but what area does he envisage it going into—the building and operating of transmitters, the leasing of them to the BBC World Service, and their eventual repayment many years ahead?

Mr. Rifkind: Two particular projects have already been identified as being likely to be suitable for the PFI. One is the Oman relay station and the other a small project at Bush house here in the United Kingdom. Of course there may be many other projects, but those two alone already amount to some £32 million compared with the £22 million target over three years that we have set the BBC. I accept that those projects are not absolutely guaranteed at the moment. Nevertheless, the signs are extremely encouraging; otherwise, I would not be referring to them in those terms.

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): I entirely agree with my right hon. and learned Friend that the Government have a very fine record of support for the BBC World Service over the years. Does he agree that since there are severe public expenditure constraints, which must apply to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as they do to other Departments, it is all the more important that we should put our support behind the service, which covers the whole world and benefits so many other countries where constraints must inevitably be tight? Is it not important to send the right messages—politically and to our friends overseas?

Mr. Rifkind: I agree with my hon. Friend. His comments allow me to draw my remarks to a conclusion as I know that many hon. Members wish to speak.

The Government took a strategic decision way back in 1979 to reverse the stagnation of the previous five years and to finance spectacular growth in the BBC World Service. Unlike the hon. Member for Livingston, we relied not only on rhetoric and protestations of good will, but on providing hard cash. Unlike the zero growth during the Labour years, the BBC World Service has enjoyed a 50 per cent. growth in real terms, a £166 million capital programme, and an expansion of its listening public around the world from 75 million to 133 million people.

As we are intensely proud to be the Government who have presided over that remarkable achievement, I can without any difficulty at all give the House the assurance that the Government do not intend to do anything that would damage the BBC World Service. On the contrary, we look forward to expanding its activity and continuing to provide the very best World Service that the world knows at the present time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Before I call the next Member to speak, I should tell the House that unless Members exercise considerable self-restraint, it will not be possible to call all those who wish to speak in this short debate.

4.57 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The Foreign Secretary may have bought off possible opposition from Conservative Members very cheaply as a result of his remarks.

I first came across the quality of the work of the World Service when I was a diplomat in Hungary in 1963-64. I saw the yearning among the Hungarian people for knowledge of the west and the way in which the BBC was able to spread democratic values, especially, of course, to young people, and with the English language. I had the privilege to speak for the Opposition on foreign affairs for nine years, and mostly dealt with the third world. I shall cite two examples of the way in which the World Service impacted on people who were important in their own countries.

I recall meeting a number of nomadic Arabs in a tent in the Sahara desert. Suddenly there was a noise: the alarm on the watch of my Arab host had sounded. He immediately left. I asked his colleagues why, and I was told that it was his practice always to listen at that time to the World Service, because of the purity of the Arabic language on it and because he valued what it told him about the world generally.

Later, I was with the present Lord Healey at a private dinner in State House in Lusaka, with the then President Kenneth Kaunda, who had listened to a debate from this House about Africa on the World Service. He clearly used the World Service as a key source of his knowledge of world events generally. He told me how opinion leaders, statesmen and potential world leaders relied so much on the World Service. That said, I suspect that there is total consensus in the House on the value of the World Service.

[Mr. Donald Anderson]

The question is whether we are prepared to see that endangered, and whether that commitment is translated into cash and resources.

How can one try to assess the real value to Britain of that unique and respected service? What will happen if we opt out, or abandon part of that service, which may well be the result of the Government's policies? I heard the apologia from the Foreign Secretary in the House today and on the "Today" programme this morning. He said that the impact will not be felt this year. That is correct, because the budget for 1997-98 is the key concern of those in the World Service. He said that efficiency savings are possible, without seeking to put a figure on them. He must do so in the context of the favourable National Audit Office report and the reductions that have already been made in the budget for the World Service.

The Foreign Secretary mentioned the private finance initiative. In principle, one cannot be against a contribution from the private sector, but, as colleagues have said, there are political sensitivities in certain areas. The private finance may or may not be available. The Foreign Secretary expressed confidence that it will be available, but there will certainly be knock-on costs of any contribution from the private sector. Those knock-on effects will mean a cost to the budget of the World Service.

The Foreign Secretary said that there will not be any impact on what he called "successful languages". It would be helpful for him to define what he means by that phrase. For example, the Finnish service may now be under threat, yet it is listened to by 25 per cent. of the population in Finland, and half the costs are covered by purchases from local radio in Finland. Is that a successful language? There are broadcasts to Afghanistan in Pushtu. Is that a successful language? Surely it is necessary for the Foreign Secretary to define what he means. What would be his priorities for cutting, when there is likely to be an impact on the range of services?

The Foreign Secretary said that there has been an increase in resources of 50 per cent. in real terms since 1979. That is true. The listening audience of the BBC World Service has increased from roughly 80 million in 1979 to 133 million today. That shows that there is a correlation between audibility and the listening audience. Surely cuts in the capital service will prevent a further and similar expansion of the listening audience.

The Foreign Secretary said that there will be a cost. My hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), in his excellent speech, put that in the context of all the unwanted Government expenditure on areas such as rail privatisation, where estimates are well in excess of £1 billion. That is unwanted and irrelevant, but, for ideological reasons, the Government are pressing ahead with it.

The Government are inclined to use brave words about our world position—phrases such as, "We are punching above our weight." What is clear from the way in which they are seeking to treat the World Service is that they are prepared to countenance a reduction in the effect of one of the key instruments which allows our country to punch above its weight.

We are now approaching a general election, when no doubt the platform rhetoric of the Conservatives will be along the lines of putting the "Great" back into Britain. Given the value of the World Service, the threat of this potentially barbaric policy means that the Government are devaluing much of what makes us "great" abroad in the full meaning of that term.

5.4 pm

Sir Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): Both Front-Bench spokesmen have rightly emphasised their pride in the work of the BBC World Service, and I join them fully in that. Those who listen all over the world will share the same view. Those who listen outside will not be able to understand why, having expressed that view, the debate then deteriorated into a petty little party squabble. They are not interested in what happened in 1977, and neither am I, for that matter—my autobiography will finish before then. They are not interested in what a Labour Government might do, should such a Government ever come about. The Foreign Secretary has quite rightly protected himself by saying that he wants to see the results before he can say what will happen in 1997. Therefore, it is essential to look at the real aspects of the problem.

Of course, when there is a financial review, the World Service and the BBC generally are considered by every Government. When a Government take office, they look at it. I recall that, when we took office in 1970, we looked at the World Service. One argument then was that things had changed so much in the 25 years since all this started. The amount of information available world wide had been limited, but, with modern technology, people could obtain information wherever they were. That was one side of the argument.

However, that was overthrown by the fact that, wherever the issue was discussed, in whatever part of the world, support for the BBC was so strong and so obviously in our interests that we said that it must continue. I am glad that the Government have greatly increased the amount going to the World Service for its performance.

I am worried about several aspects of the future of the World Service. I am not happy about privatising it. The suspicion will grow in other places in the world that the BBC is no longer completely independent. That is a great danger. What we learned in 1970 and ever since is that the greatest possible advantage of the World Service is the trust it inspires everywhere, and the confidence that people have in it. The outside broadcasts of some other countries, particularly the United States of America, do not have that confidence or trust. In fact, a great deal of what is heard is disbelieved, and rightly so.

As a general word, privatisation can go too far, as can Government ownership. I believe that this sphere should remain entirely under BBC control. The discussion about handing over Whitehall to private enterprise is incredible. There has never been an open discussion about it. Like the BBC World Service, Whitehall is renowned for its integrity and administrative ability. Will people say that all that remains the same when enterprise people take it over, and are there to make their own money out of it?

It is a horrifying thought, and cannot do the country, the House or our party any good. One knows of the low morale of so much of the civil service today, and that can only get worse with such discussions. So I am not at all happy about the idea of privatisation.

I do not accept that we cannot afford it. It is a small amount compared with total budgetary involvement. It is completely unacceptable to say that we are not in a position to carry on with what the BBC wants to do. We can and should do so.

Another argument is that to deny the BBC World Service some Government expenditure will make it improve its efficiency. I doubt it. Because the calculation for increased efficiency is too high, the instrument may be damaged. As the World Service will be unable to increase the efficiency demanded of it, I am afraid that it will have no alternative but to abandon some of what it does.

We have seen many examples of that, the greatest of which, alas, is the lack of emergency beds throughout the hospital service today, which has been caused because funding was reduced to such an extent. People said that that would make the hospital service increase its efficiency, but it reached the stage where that simply was not possible. Instead of putting funds into reserve for emergencies, we took them away to increase hospitals' efficiency. That is the most blatant example of how that philosophy has gone wrong.

Thus there is a severe limit on how much one can increase the World Service's efficiency. One must be immensely careful about that. As the Foreign Secretary cannot say what he will do in 1997, I hope that he will bear in mind the fact that we want him to ensure that the World Service maintains its full efficiency and coverage, including languages. He spoke clearly about the additional languages that have now been taken on. If there are more languages, let us take them on. With the service's increased range and penetration, we can cover vast areas of Asia, even though some countries may not want to be covered. That must be one purpose of our policy.

I said that people trust the World Service. I listen to it a lot. I always get the news from it, and listen to discussions on it when I travel and after a late night here, and I have come to the conclusion that the BBC World Service is now the only impartial part of the BBC. I do not say that from a party point of view but because of the behaviour of those on the other programmes.

In the great days of the BBC, interviewers enabled interviewees to explain their views, but that is not their position today. They are there to prove that the other chap is always wrong, and they never hesitate to make him look ridiculous, a liar or just unsuitable for interview. That is a deplorable development by BBC programmes, on both radio and television—perhaps more on television, because people like to be seen being unpleasant. The World Service has not been affected by that, and I hope that it will not be.

I repeat my request to the Secretary of State to safeguard the position. He should not be misled by privatisation and the thought of how well the World Service would do it. If it goes for privatisation, it will seek first to make money, and secondly, to influence the BBC if it so wishes. We want neither of those things. The Government can look after and control the BBC's expenditure perfectly well. They do so at present, and they can do so for the overseas programme.

I am glad that this debate has been called. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me a chance to speak for a few minutes. The matter is vital, because the World Service contributes enormously to respect of this country and gives the rest of the world an impartial view of what is happening world wide, which is invaluable for the rest of the world as well as for us. When the Secretary of State replies to such a debate again in 1997 or 1998, I hope that he will say that we have kept the World Service and expanded it still further, and that we were not led astray by all the temptations of 1996.

5.13 pm

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and West Devon): Whatever first task fell to me, speaking from the Liberal Democrat Benches, none could give me more satisfaction, nor a more challenging task, than to focus on the BBC World Service. As other hon. Members have said, it has an outstanding past. As this debate emphasises, it is going through a difficult present, but what matters most is its future, which must be our concern today.

How can 150 million people be wrong? That is how many people around the world tune in each day, by conservative estimates. The BBC's estimate is 133 million, excluding China, Iran, Vietnam and Afghanistan, where many more millions of people must listen. The size of the BBC's international audience and influence is unrivalled.

The most chilling comment that I have heard recently about the World Service was from an insider, who said:

"The threatened cuts, with their effect on operating budgets and capital investment, could lead to a slow, lingering death. The BBC will not be a Broadcasting Organisation worthy of the name in the 21st century. It will wither and die".

Good housekeeping, financial prudence and private finance initiatives all have their place in good government, but I fundamentally worry that the Government's difficulties in controlling expenditure in the vast spending Departments lead them to be thoughtless and arbitrary in small monetary cuts aimed at vital successful British endeavours such as the BBC World Service, the Commonwealth Development Corporation, the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission and the Commonwealth Institute, where cuts endanger the whole endeavour and are not merely excisions at the edges.

The latest comment that I have heard was from a business visitor who returned from Kuwait yesterday. He said that, at an embassy reception, a group of other European ambassadors declared that they would give their eye teeth to have a service such as the BBC World Service for their own countries. It is beyond their comprehension why we should for ever be cutting it back instead of expanding it.

Demise may not be an exaggeration, given the huge investment needed for technological advance, such as putting the World Service on the Internet, digital broadcasting and replacing worn-out transmitters. Even the Foreign Office admits that audibility is vital.

Sir Peter Emery: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it not still a procedure of this House that one does not read a speech? The fact that this speech was circulated beforehand so that everybody has it, and it is now being read, cannot be correct.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman is right. It is accepted that only Ministers should read speeches. On the whole, however, the Chair takes a tolerant attitude on that. If it were strictly enforced, a good many hon. Members might feel very uncomfortable.

Miss Nicholson: As I was saying, audibility is vital. If one cannot hear, it is no good—I should know.

[Miss Nicholson]

If Britain had no independent voice in the world, this country would be a poorer place culturally, educationally and economically. British business says that the World Service boosts British trade in securing exports. In a recent survey, the top 50 United Kingdom companies said that the BBC World Service creates an aura of trust for Britain abroad and makes their job easier. The return in trade and export earnings must be vast.

If the World Service did not exist, not only Britain would be deprived. The whole world would be a poorer place, as so many parts of it rely on the World Service for factual, impartial broadcasts and for that invaluable commodity, the truth, which is in short supply in times of conflict and danger. In times of crisis—wars, famines, revolutions and earthquakes—the BBC's audience overseas rockets. In the affected region and the country under scrutiny, many people rely specifically and only on the BBC for news. How can Ministers evaluate that in terms of pounds, ecus or roubles? The World Service is a brand leader without equal, envied around the globe in war and peace.

I am sure that the new BBC chairman will be successful, and that his fund of knowledge and experience will be put to good effect, but I am sad that the procedure of the appointment and its announcement by the Government did not adhere to the constitutional position in the 1981 BBC charter. We must not drop full preservation of political impartiality, as the Government have done.

As we have already heard, the BBC also exports the English language, not just on the air but in educational videos, audio tapes and written packages. Millions listen to it for that reason alone. What value can be put on that internationally? The extensive and growing use of English in the world not only involves transmitting our language but boosts the work of our publishers and authors.

In political and strategic terms, many world leaders, having had their first contact, when young, with British values and activities through the BBC World Service, retain a special relationship with us, and a fondness for our attitudes, which influences their decisions beneficially in favour of our views.

What about human rights activists and political prisoners, such as Solzhenitsyn and Aung San Suu Kyi, and hostages such as Terry Waite? How did they praise the BBC World Service? They saw it as their lifeline and morale booster, especially the emergency Gulf link programme, which was the forerunner of other lifeline crisis programmes for Bosnia, Rwanda—whose programme was partly non-governmental organisation funded—and Somalia when they were otherwise unreachable. How can that be measured in money?

We must not forget the World Service's science, development, environment and health education programmes. Radio reaches where other media cannot—to the blind and the illiterate, for example. As I know, television reaches where the deaf cannot understand in any other way, through subtitling.

How many hundreds of babies in India may have been saved from a lifetime of blindness through BBC World Service radio broadcasts on the importance of vitamin A? How many babies in Peru and Bolivia have been saved from death at birth by the BBC's "Quecha" health programme? How many teenagers have learned to avoid the risks of HIV and AIDS, and how many civilians have learnt how to avoid the risks of land mines? This development may be cheap to the Government, but it is beyond price to those who receive it. How do we add up the lost eyes and limbs in the profit-and-loss accounts?

Selfishly, I declare a keen interest in the BBC Arabic service, the value of which I have seen in refugee camps in the Persian Gulf.

The value of the World Service is therefore incalculable, while the cuts and their effects are all too frighteningly calculable. We know the figures: a modest, in terms of the national Budget, £4.5 million cut in the financial year 1997-98. That will amount to a £10 million shortfall in the overall operating budget of £135 million. To put it in a national budgetary perspective, that is the cost of three or four modern aircraft, of which we lost three last week.

I say most sincerely that we must also be careful that the Government, in forcing the BBC to pursue the private finance initiative, do not compromise political and commercial impartiality. The necessity for long-term planning makes the PFI a fragile answer.

Perhaps the cuts are being made in the wrong places and for the wrong reasons. The BBC World Service has just dropped French for Europe, and the German service, already reduced, may be cut further. That is in despite of our membership of the European Union and the need to put over Britain's views in countries where many people still do not speak English.

The entire European Union surely seeks to hear our values, and listens keenly to statements of our interests. Our thoughts are needed in the democratic development of the Union. Fifty per cent. of the BBC's transcription topical tapes service, which accounts for much of the work in the developing world, has been cut off. That is surely another implicit cut in overseas aid, this time in education.

Of course, not everything is gloom and contraction. The BBC has played a valuable part in training and in revitalising broadcasting. Despite international competition and the end of the cold war, audiences are increasing. New services have been started in Macedonian, in Azeri for Azerbaijan, and in Uzbek for Uzbekistan. The Arabic service, which proved its worth again in the Gulf war, may expand alongside the newly created Arabic television service.

Some countries re-broadcast the BBC 24 hours a day—Singapore, Australia and New Zealand. A new joint service, which began on 1 January in partnership with a United States station in Boston, is attracting many more listeners to hear our values, culture and output in north America.

That success story can be disrupted by the cuts we are discussing. The BBC has to invest to survive. It plans to put its service on the Internet, not only in English but in, for example, Cantonese, to exploit high computer ownership in Hong Kong. Surely that will be a valuable back-up to our influence in Hong Kong after the transfer to China in 1997.

We have already heard that the BBC has to replace its weak and aging transmitter in Masirah and relocate it on the mainland of Oman at a cost of £30 million, to be

funded under the PFI. That involves not only the difficulty that he who pays the piper calls the tune but the question of repayment, which will place a further burden on operating costs. Yet that transmitter and its impartiality are vital for reaching the Persian Gulf and the Indian subcontinent, where the BBC has such a large and vital audience, with vast trading potential; and, in the case of the Indian subcontinent, English is an inherited language.

The cuts, combined with necessary investment, will also, in time, put more foreign language programmes at risk—perhaps 25 per cent. of them, or 10 out of the present 40. That means that threats will hang over transmissions in Czech, Slovak, Slovene, Hungarian and Romanian, and perhaps even in Serb and Croatian, to the cauldron of the Balkans. Hon. Members will recall what an important factor the BBC was in the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia, the abortive Hungarian revolution, the overthrow of President Ceausescu, the collapse of the Warsaw pact as central Europe rediscovered democracy, and above all the ending of the communist stranglehold on the USSR.

It is possible that the Spanish and Portuguese services to Latin America may be dropped.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will the hon. Lady give way on the subject of Latin America?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The rule is quite clear. If the hon. Member who has the Floor does not wish to give way, he or she is under no obligation to do so.

Miss Nicholson: Latin America is a vast area of more than 300 million people, with enormous trade potential for the UK, as so many recent ministerial visits indicate.

Not so long ago, during the Falklands war, the UK Government created their own Radio Atlantico del Sur, which proved so amateurish and ineffectual, whereas World Service correspondents were greeted in the Falklands by banners of gratitude proclaiming, "God Bless the BBC!"

Foreign Office Ministers would be foolish to ignore, as they have in the past, the dangers of the Falklands sovereignty dilemma, which still exists, as does Argentina's deadline of the year 2000 for taking over the Falklands, just when there may be vast oil riches to be found off their shores.

The Government continually fail to learn the certain lessons of the past in order to anticipate the uncertain lessons of the future. I fear that, where the dictators and oppressors have failed, our Treasury Minister bookkeepers, aided by a weak-willed, blinkered and ostrich-minded Cabinet, will succeed in weakening or eventually silencing altogether a powerful voice for Britain.

In conclusion, I have a couple of old tributes that are well worth repeating. They may stick in the minds of Ministers more than anything else. Even a rival and critic such as Teheran Radio said:

"England without the BBC is a lion without mane or tail, whose funeral will soon be due."

The *New York Times* journalist Mr. Malcolm Brown famously declared:

"The BBC is, for the free mind, what Oxfam is for the hungry."

5.27 pm

Mr. Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster): It is always a pleasure—I hope that I am being duly chivalrous—to follow the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Miss Nicholson), even if I am tempted to be somewhat more caustic bearing in mind the fact that she made my new year considerably more active than it might otherwise have been.

I hope in this speech at least to say something that my hon. Friends do not know that I am going to say before I say it. I will be succinct because many hon. Members want to speak. First, I shall briefly talk about my personal connections with the BBC World Service. I am sure that the memories of many hon. Members will be similar.

My connection goes back to a Cambridge university expedition in 1961 across mountains and deserts which involved camping and all the rest of it. What happened to me then can be summed up by the only quotation that I want to use, because it says it all. It is from a letter that came to me from Sarah Reynolds in Suffolk as a result of the publicity surrounding the financial problems of the World Service. She wrote also to her own Member of Parliament.

Sarah Reynolds was on the edge of the Sahara desert in temperatures of 45 deg C. She wrote:

"I heard voices outside and the sound of static. Upon investigation I found a group of people crowded around a tiny transistor radio. They were listening to the BBC World Service (Africa service in French).

When the News was over, I asked them why they did not tune in to Radio Niger—it would be so much easier to listen to. 'Because we would hear what the government wants us to hear,' I was told. 'We can trust the news we hear from the BBC to be the truth.' 'Would it not be easier to listen to Radio France International?' I asked. 'We prefer to listen to the BBC World Service.'"

That is what she was told.

I shall telescope my comments by adding that, many years ago, I married an Iranian woman. By means of stories and a history which are too long to relate, the 1979 Iranian revolution occurred—when Ayatollah Khomeini was sitting under a tree in Paris, as some hon. Members may remember—and there was a considerable outcry against the BBC World Service, which also affected the British Government, from the Shah of Iran's Government.

I found myself on the other side of the fence, in the sense that I was asked by the then Iranian embassy to act in effect as an unofficial monitor of the BBC World Service. I spent some days over there scrutinising the scripts, including what had been left in and left out, according to the editor's pencil. I have no doubt that, although a Government who were a prominent ally of this country fell in that revolution—the final consequences of it have not yet been seen—the BBC World Service, much to the detriment of my wife's family, told the truth. Long may it continue to do so.

Since 1985, I have had the pleasure of helping to lead various World Service campaigns in the House, but it has not been roses, roses all the way—it is not today. Bearing in mind the enormous service that the BBC has rendered to the country, it has always had difficulty in making its case. We have seen elements of that difficulty in this debate. As this has been mentioned, I remind the House that, although we are grateful for the Government's audibility programme, which began in 1982, there was a considerable campaign, lasting several years, during the

[Mr. Peter Temple-Morris]

mid-1980s to get BBC World Service Television off the ground. The then Prime Minister resisted the launch of that project, during which time CNN took off. I firmly believe that, had World Service Television got off the ground when we wanted it to, CNN would not be in its present position of almost world paramountcy.

We had to mount another campaign at the beginning of this Parliament, in the 1992-93 Session, in relation to the triennium that is still running in the current financial year. I am grateful for all the support that the all-party early-day motion received—400 signatures. I think that the House, by choosing to express its appreciation of the BBC World Service through so many signatures, and bearing in mind those who do not or cannot sign early-day motions, passed its verdict. That was the third largest number of signatures to an early-day motion, coming after something like maternity and the second world war. That was the sort of class that we were in.

The objective of my speech and the debate is to underline the importance of the work of the World Service. I shall limit myself to mentioning specific points on that subject and discussing the need to protect the World Service's operating budget, our major concern, for the next triennium, 1997 to 2000.

I should, however, first briefly mention the specific work of the service. Many of the words of praise for the World Service should also, in some measure, be addressed to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which is beginning to get a slight complex—I have sympathy with it—about the massive outcry on behalf of the World Service. We should also not forget the important representative work that is done by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, or our old friend, the British Council. I could expand on that, but this debate is on the BBC World Service, for which the House has already shown its support.

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) that we could maintain the World Service's budget if we really wanted to do so, and that the money involved is not very great. There must be a Treasury fault line somewhere. In government, one understands that, when one is engaged on a tough public expenditure round, cuts must be seen to be fair and distributed across the board. Any system that is not sufficiently flexible to protect something like the BBC World Service cannot, by definition, be a very good one.

We have discussed the plans for the future of the World Service, and it has been praised. I want to discuss its budget. First of all—as has been merely mentioned, not underlined—the World Service is already making efficiency savings, and has been for some considerable time. It has recently been the beneficiary of a very favourable National Audit Office report, and I should like to think that such checking and cross-checking had an effect on a tight public expenditure round. Only last summer, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the World Service conducted a capital review, which was made public in August 1995.

The review identified, perhaps before the Treasury came into the picture, a considerable need to increase capital expenditure during the next triennium. Perhaps it is intended that that expenditure will be derived through different means—the private finance initiative. I am very close to the line taken by my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup on that. The PFI generally seems, in the almost frenzied atmosphere that surrounds Budgets these days, to be assuming an almost holy role: the PFI is brought in on this, and it is wheeled in on that. We are dealing with something that is not necessarily the easiest area for the PFI. The private sector is not always the best risk taker.

The great reliance on Masirah island and the plan for a middle east relay station in Oman account for the vast proportion of £32 million. The relay station is a classic example of where the PFI could be used, because it is located in the middle of a turbulent region. It will be interesting to see whether the private sector will come forward as required to fund that development.

Many of the sites and much of the plant with which we are concerned require improvement and modernisation. They are in need of infrastructural improvement, rather than being natural candidates for the PFI.

Last, but not least, foreign Governments like to be dealing Government-to-Government, and they see the BBC as a part of the Government, although they all know that it is not. More important, however, those Governments have trust and confidence in the BBC's independence. That must not be undermined for any reason.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): The hon. Gentleman knows a lot about this issue. Is there anything to stop Mr. Murdoch or controversial Arab-based funds, for example, becoming part of the PFI? What would that do to the reputation of the World Service?

Mr. Temple-Morris: I am grateful to the hon. Member for raising that question, because the Government of the day will have to keep a careful eye on that during the unfolding events. BBC World Service Television in the far east has also had its life made much more difficult because of a certain satellite which was bought up by Mr. Murdoch. So the lesson is there to be learnt.

I should like to end with my central anxiety. It was encompassed largely by an intervention I made earlier which was similar to one or two other interventions. The BBC World Service is already absorbing cuts during the current triennium. It has accepted the reduction in its capital budget—it is not arguing about that; it will absorb that. This is the first time, in the current financial year, that the budget for a triennium has been disturbed during its passage. Although we all say how marvellous the BBC World Service is, we must realise that it must remain competitive and preserve its position. It is way ahead of the field and it must stay there. It is undoubtedly in the national interest to improve and expand the service.

On the issue of money, there are some differences in the figures, but there is a planned cut in Her Majesty's Government's capital and current contributions to the World Service budget. If the private finance initiative, on which reliance is placed—good luck to it—is successful and becomes more successful, that will have an obvious effect on the operating budget of the BBC World Service. We cannot consider one without the other.

As became clear during the speech of my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary, there is a key question to be asked in relation to the motion and the amendment. That question is whether, in the light of what my right hon. and learned Friend said about the PFI, there is likely to be a reduction in the range of foreign language

broadcasts. That is what the issues boil down to. It is difficult to vote against either the motion or the amendment. A further question for me is whether one can possibly support the Opposition motion or abstain from voting on it.

We hope that the PFI will be successful. It might be less successful than we now hope—I mentioned Oman, the biggest PFI project. Sooner or later, the Government may have to face a BBC World Service that says that it is strapped for cash and one or other of its language services will have to go. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary made certain undertakings on that issue; he went one stage beyond the PFI. I, for one, accept my right hon. and learned Friend's good faith for the moment.

I offer a few words of caution: we are discussing the next triennium. The negotiations are starting now and, as we proceed through the year towards autumn, more of the factors will become clear. For the moment, we should minimise the cuts and be generous with the negotiations for the next triennium. I am sure that, once the negotiations are concluded, the subject will return to the House and every word uttered by the Government, whom I support, will then be reconsidered.

5.42 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris), who is one of the few truly civilised Tories left in the House.

I declare my interests in the subject: I am one of the parliamentary advisers to the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union, which represents many World Service staff members. Before I was elected to Parliament in 1983, I was the union's full-time official and was responsible for its membership in Bush house and at Caversham. Now, my contact with it is as a fairly regular contributor to the excellent programme "People in Politics" and to BBC World Service Television.

One question that strikes me—I know that it strikes many other hon. Members—is how such a wonderful service can be provided under such primitive conditions at Bush house and elsewhere. The World Service is superb—we can agree on that across the House. It is one of the few British institutions, perhaps the only one, that are world leaders but, in relative terms, it is run on a shoestring. There is enormous cross-party support in the House for the World Service, but, despite all the plaudits that it receives in the House and around the world, it still keeps having to suffer cuts. Those cuts have come not just from this Government but from previous Labour Governments—that must be placed firmly on the record.

Who in the Foreign Office has the knife out for the World Service? It is clear that someone has. No one in the Foreign Office is listening to what we are saying in the House and someone is feeding poison against the World Service into the Secretary of State's ear. Someone has been feeding that poison into the ears of previous Secretaries of State, including Labour ones. I do not understand how we could even contemplate cuts, however small, in one of this country's success stories—this country is short of success stories, despite the propaganda and noise from Conservative Members.

The Secretary of State mentioned the need to reduce expenditure. Which successful multinational company that was the world leader in its sector would contemplate cutting its capital expenditure? Such a company would increase its capital expenditure to enhance its position as the world leader. It is nonsense; we would not expect any multinational company to operate in that way, so why should we expect the BBC World Service to do so?

If the Government want to find extra resources to fund the World Service, they should look elsewhere in the Foreign Office budget. They could look to the £7.6 million spent by the Department last year on official hospitality or to the almost £400 million spent by the Department every year on funding our embassies and high commissions around the world. I am not saying that they do not do a good job; I am not even saying that I have not raised the odd glass of champagne at a Foreign Office reception. But I would cheerfully give it up and I would certainly give up the second and third glasses to allow the money to be used to fund the World Service. There is plenty of opportunity in the Foreign Office budget for the Government to find the savings if they are so minded, but the World Service faces a cut of £5.4 million in its capital expenditure in the next financial year.

The Secretary of State said that the private finance initiative could be used, but how will that be funded? The money has to be paid back; it is not free money. Someone will expect the interest payments and the leasebacks to be funded—they will have to be funded from operating expenditure. Where else is the money to come from? I should be grateful if the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the right hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), would clarify that issue when he winds up the debate. As I understand it, future operating expenditure will be cut by £8.6 million in the first year of the next triennium. I should be grateful if the Minister would either confirm that or tell me that my facts are wrong.

The Government announced the decision on capital cuts and the availability of the PFI after the business plans of the World Service had been drawn up, yet Ministers have the nerve to appear on the "Today" programme or stand at the Dispatch Box and talk about efficiency. They tell the World Service to throw into the melting pot all the capital funds and projects that it has already drawn up and to see whether it can raise money in the private sector. That is a crazy way to run any business, particularly the World Service. The Government talk about efficiency savings, but the way in which they have handled the funding of the World Service is the opposite of efficient. The World Service still has to deal with the last round of cuts—about £6 million.

Part of the measure of the efficiency of any organisation, including the World Service, is staff morale. At present, morale is low because, despite receiving plaudits from politicians, both in and out of the studios, and from around the world, the World Service staff continually have to face further cuts. They face those cuts because some idiot in the Foreign Office feels that it is not sensible to invest taxpayers' money in the World Service.

The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) said that he was not happy to have privatisation in this sector. If the Government have their way, the BBC's transmission—both domestic and World

[Mr. Tony Banks]

Service—will soon be privatised. That privatisation, in itself, poses a dramatic threat to BBC independence, especially that of the World Service.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway), who has now left the Chamber, mentioned the censorship of the BBC's Arabic service over the subject of Dr. Al-Masari. The Secretary of State said that he wanted some hard evidence—it is there for anyone to see. The BBC's Arabic television service is transmitted via a Saudi-owned satellite relay station in Rome. The company that owns the satellite station is Orbit Communications, which in turn is owned by a cousin of King Fahd, and it blanked out the BBC's transmission. If we sell the BBC's transmission service—if the transmitters go and they are bought by foreign companies, perhaps companies that are fronts for foreign Governments—the independence and impartiality of the BBC World Service will be threatened.

It is the independence, fairness and impartiality of the BBC World Service that commend it so strongly to peoples throughout the world. If we were to damage that reputation, it would be a crime—a crime perpetrated by the present Government.

5.49 pm

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): I have a small interest to declare. I remember receiving a cheque from the overseas service of the BBC—I suppose that that is under the same rubric—in the 1980s. It was a cheque for a very small sum, paid to me for impersonating an English dustman to the then Soviet Union. It was a rotten script—I believe I wrote it myself. I subsequently impersonated a British politician for the World Service several times to several countries. Those are my interests.

I need not express sympathy or admiration for the World Service, because every right hon. or hon. Member who has spoken has done so for me. All I shall say is that it is a pity that sometimes we do not hear programmes of the same analytical depth on, let us say, BBC Radio 4. Some of the malt whiskies that we make in this country are delicious, but one can find them only abroad; it is similar with some of the World Service broadcasts. Would that one might hear them on the domestic services more frequently.

The establishment of BBC World Service Television was mentioned earlier. I have a bit of a "mea culpa" to make because, at the time when I joined the campaign to try to obtain some seedcorn—if my memory serves, only about £4 million—my pitch was that if we did not have that £4 million, nothing would happen.

I turned out to be wrong, in the sense that something got off the ground. It is a matter for discussion whether it might have done so sooner, and perhaps would have put in a better competitive performance vis-à-vis CNN if that £4 million had been found, but I must be honest and say that the Government were right, to the extent that the service did materialise and is doing well at the moment.

Listening to the debate, I have a sense of disproportion. It seems to me disproportionate that the Government should have allowed themselves to be put in the dock in the way that they have been during the debate and in the way that they have been by the media, for the sake of a relatively small sum. I am occasionally accused of not understanding politics, but I understand that to make a big political issue out of a small number of millions is not a very political approach. I pride myself on understanding that, if nothing else. The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) added to the sense of disproportion in the excessive forcefulness of some of his remarks. One cannot get away from the fact that the Government have enormously expanded the World Service, and should be congratulated on doing so.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State gave two assurances earlier, which have in effect punctured the debate. First, he said to my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) that he would reconsider the matter if essential programmes were threatened. Secondly, he made what I understand to be an important concession, allowing capital to be transferred to revenue if that should prove necessary.

It is odd that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State did not say that on "Today" this morning, because everyone knows that "Today" is the real Parliament in this country. [HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish."] Mr. John Humphrys is the Opposition spokesman, the Prime Minister and Mr. Speaker to boot. What better place might there be for my right hon. and learned Friend to make his two concessions? For that is what they are. I assume that those concessions were arrived at after a great deal of scurrying and patter of fast footwork in the Treasury during the day. Never mind; we got there in the end.

I hope that there is a lesson for everyone involved. As the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) said, an incessant, curiously aggressive attitude appears to stem from somewhere towards the World Service. I have experienced it personally, as the hon. Gentleman conceded, under the previous Labour Government. I happened to be involved as a principal private secretary at the time. The Government were literally counting up thousands of pounds for the Pushtu service, which was a strange way for the then Foreign Secretary, Dr. David Owen, to spend his time. Other things of greater magnitude were going on in the world.

I make no apology for my involvement because it was compulsory, but that seemed a strange thing to do. It struck me as strange that today, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State should have been forced to come to the Chamber—because I am sorry to say that that is what happened—because of those rather small cuts.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Will my hon. Friend direct his remarks to the anxiety expressed by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) about the dangers that might face the overseas service of the BBC if capital came in through a front company that might represent an overseas country, especially the dangers for the transmission services, which might lead to the blocking of the overseas service in parts of the world that are vital to the United Kingdom?

Mr. Walden: As my hon. Friend invites me to express an opinion on that subject, I shall. It has always been my opinion that, as a rule of thumb in matters of privatisation, one should be—and I am—in favour of privatising anything that moves, provided that it does not affect or enter into what I call the cultural sector. By that I mean education, broadcasting and similar spheres. That does not exclude the involvement of private capital.

I do not want to discuss the specific case that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West mentioned, because I do not know enough about it, but if that is true, it seems to me to mark the limit that one should keep an eye on, in involving private capital in what are essentially, as I say in shorthand, cultural fields, because it is possible to get oneself into some nasty political spots.

Mention has been made of China, which I suspect will be very important in that regard in future. It will be extremely important for us to be able to broadcast freely to the Chinese because, as we all know, there is likely to be turbulence in that country.

Other hon. Members want to speak. I believe that I have made my argument. I welcome the reassurances that the Secretary of State gave. I only lament that it was necessary for him to give them in that form.

5.57 pm

Mr. Jim Dowd (Lewisham, West): Throughout the House, the BBC World Service is regarded a precious asset to the United Kingdom, providing an international advantage that many other nations envy, including many of our industrial competitors. However, we are not here tonight simply to indulge in a paean of praise to the World Service.

The people who work in the BBC World Service throughout the world, in Bush house or elsewhere, are not all saints. They try to do a job on behalf of broadcasting and on behalf of the country, but not significantly on behalf of the Government of the country. From time to time, the Government have been led into conflict with foreign Governments who do not share our traditions and ways, because those Governments cannot understand that the BBC World Service is not the Government's voice and that the Government cannot direct propaganda over the BBC World Service, although the BBC World Service is very much the voice of Britain.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) on prevailing to ensure that we held the debate tonight because, as the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) made plain, were it not for the fact that we are holding the debate now, we should not have obtained the concessions that we have obtained from the Foreign Secretary, although I shall return to them later to examine their worth.

The hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris) spoke elegantly and eloquently on behalf of the BBC World Service. While he was speaking, my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson)—who has had to leave the Chamber for a short time—remarked to me that the hon. Gentleman had stolen all the things that he wanted to say. I replied that the hon. Gentleman had stolen all that I wished to say also.

The hon. Gentleman gave a cogent declaration of the technical position. We are not here today simply to praise the BBC World Service; we must also examine the hard cash reality of its position and the Government's decision to abandon the three-year agreement unilaterally and to impose a separate settlement upon the BBC World Service.

The National Audit Office report to which the hon. Gentleman referred makes it plain that there is scope for improvement and savings within the BBC World Service. That is the case with any large organisation. The report also underlined the fact that the World Service provides excellent value for taxpayers' money and that it is continuing to make considerable progress in that direction.

The Government's action in the second year of the triennial agreement must cast doubt upon their good intentions in the matter. How can a three-year agreement be broken unilaterally at any stage? What will be the status of the 1997-98 agreement? I believe that that agreement will be negotiated under different management, so to speak. None the less, if a Government give their word that an agreement shall last for three, five or however many years, they must honour that commitment. An agreement cannot be unilaterally re-examined, and the Government have destroyed their credibility in the matter.

The Foreign Secretary and his Ministers have faced questioning about BBC World Service funding during Foreign Office questions on the past two occasions and I was fortunate to be called to speak both times. On the first occasion, the Foreign Secretary quoted personnel at the BBC World Service very selectively—as he did again earlier this evening—in order to justify his position. He quoted the managing director, Mr. Younger, as saying that the World Service was looking at the application of the private finance initiative. He continued:

"Equally, we will be taking a fresh look at the scope for further efficiency".

The Foreign Secretary did not go on to quote Mr. Younger's next comment:

"However, I am greatly concerned at the possible implications for our programme services of the cuts planned over the next two years".

The Foreign Secretary also quoted the chairman of the BBC up to the point when he said:

"On the other hand, I am worried lest these proposed cuts will have a greater effect on our service than is immediately apparent".

The chairman went on to say:

"As we explore the Private Finance Initiative and other projects, we will keep the Foreign Office closely informed of our progress in minimising damage"—

he did not say "avoiding damage"—

"to the services we supply to over 133 million people".

That brings me to the PFI and what has been said about it. No one, including the Foreign Secretary, has confirmed whether the Government are prepared to underwrite the on-going negative revenue effects of a successful PFI. In BBC World Service terms, the more successful it is, the greater effect it will have on the operating budget. Are the Government prepared to underwrite it and, therefore, insulate the World Service from the effects of increased revenue payments? If they are not, they are simply seeking to buy a short-term benefit from reducing capital today at the expense of long-term liabilities on the operating budget tomorrow.

The perceived independence of the BBC is at the heart of its international reputation. The hon. Member for Leominster referred to the effects of the television transmitter and to the problems with the Star satellite in Asia. Hon. Members should consider that situation for a few moments. The satellite used to carry BBC World Service Television—it is not funded by the same agreement, but it provides an instrumental lesson—to the far east. It was bought by a company owned by Rupert Murdoch—if it was not News International, it was certainly one of its subsidiaries.

[Mr. Jim Dowd]

Mr. Murdoch wanted to beam programmes into China, but the Chinese Government objected most strongly to the line that they believed the BBC and Britain were taking with regard to Hong Kong. As a consequence, the Chinese Government blackmailed—I hesitate to use that word, but I believe that the House will understand the pressure that was applied—Murdoch television to replace BBC World Service Television on the satellite. They were ultimately successful, as I believe that it has now been replaced by CNN or something else.

That means that a large part of south-east Asia cannot receive BBC World Service Television. It demonstrates clearly that once the infrastructure is in private hands, it is susceptible to political interference and corruption. I think that that serves as a lesson for the BBC in the future.

I come now to the purpose and the effect of the BBC World Service. I do not think that we are being culturally myopic or adopting a little Englander or little Britain mentality if we say that the BBC World Service is the best in the world. One of my constituents, who is also a very good friend, is a Sri Lankan Tamil with relatives living in Sri Lanka. When Rajiv Gandhi decided to send the ill-fated Indian peacekeeping force to intervene in the civil war in Sri Lanka and it invaded the north of the island, my friend was obviously very concerned about his family's fate. He contacted his relatives in Colombo in order to ascertain whether everything was all right.

My friend spoke to his father and asked him what was going on. His father replied, "We are not really sure. We are all fairly safe, but we are trying to find out what is going on." My friend then asked how he was doing that and his father replied, "We are listening to the BBC World Service." Members of that family were not listening to national radio in Colombo or to All India Radio; they were listening to the BBC—and they were listening particularly for Mark Tully. My friend's family was listening to the BBC, first, because the BBC was more likely to know what was going on and, secondly, because it was most likely to tell the truth.

We must not jeopardise the BBC's status in that regard. The World Service is not simply an excellent and significant asset to this country, which represents good value for money: it is the greatest and most powerful international advocate of the values for which this nation stands.

6.6 pm

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): I am speaking at this late stage of the debate because I believe that the matter should be considered in a perfectly calm and logical manner. We have achieved that aim for about half the debate, but it certainly was not evident in the approach adopted by that rather disappointed little lady, the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Miss Nicholson), who, as a Conservative, was entirely frustrated at not being promoted within the Government. Her suggestion that the BBC World Service would wither and die is the most nonsensical statement that has been made today and I believe that the remainder of her speech can be dismissed on the same basis.

I suggest that there is something very wrong in the House when, for the first time in my 35 years' experience, a Back Bencher circulates a speech prior to its delivery and then reads it verbatim to hon. Members. If we have reached that stage, we may as well adopt the American system of placing speeches in the record and therefore lose all opportunity for debate in this place.

No hon. Member would argue that the BBC World Service does not fill an essential need that no one else in the world can supply. The BBC World Service does its job with efficiency and with a degree of informed opinion that is unknown in any other national broadcasting service. As has been mentioned time and again, most importantly the World Service is trusted—and it is trusted most where the news often takes the form of propaganda rather than the truth. It is in those places that the BBC World Service is most appreciated.

The BBC World Service is particularly important to the emerging nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States. As treasurer of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, I speak with some authority when I say that the emerging democracies listen to the BBC World Service. When no one else could fill that role, they received instruction from the World Service about politics and about running democratic institutions and local government. Broadcasts in Serbian, Croatian, Macedonian, Uzbek and now Kazakh are a major step in that direction.

It is with considerable pride that we are able to claim that the number of potential listeners, or those who listen from time to time—the total is now 133 million—is likely to grow over the next three to five years.

Let us consider the private finance initiative and the proposition of privatisation. The suggestions of the possible dangers reflect a misunderstanding. If private capital is used purely for building and capital assets—projects that would normally have to be financed by the taxpayer—and there is what would normally be a kind of sale and leaseback but in fact is a contract to build with a set leaseback over a period, many of the worries that have been expressed will disappear.

What of the idea that we shall be eating into Supply expenditure? What is the return on any capital that is borrowed? Interest on that capital must be obtained in some way, and it is usually linked to come from Supply expenditure.

I am not for privatisation for the sake of it. I support the process, however, where it can be seen to have a direct benefit in releasing the taxpayer from having to provide moneys. If that is the result, it is excellent. It has been suggested that private finance can produce about £32 million for capital compared with the Government's allocation of £20 million. Part of the Government's money, not private money, would come back into the Supply sector. That must be beneficial. There is much business sense in the way in which that approach could be carried forward.

I have had discussions with the World Service. I have often broadcast on the service, way back from the 1960s. It was fearing a 10 or 15 per cent. cut in Supply expenditure, but that has not happened. It is important—*[Interruption.]*—to understand that the minimum action has been taken. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary said, it should not affect any aspect of the World Service's broadcasting. We must have that

assurance. Indeed, I thought that that assurance had been given a long time before the debate. The assurance was not dragged out as a result of the debate. The assurance—*[Interruption.]*—goes a long way to overcoming any objection that can—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The House knows my views on repeated seated interjections.

Sir Peter Emery: So that other Members can contribute to the debate—

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Peter Emery: No. I want to give other Members the opportunity to make their views known. The hon. Gentleman might be able to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The financial factors that the Government have put before us make good sense. It has not been understood that within the Foreign Office budget the greatest increases over the past five years have been made available to the World Service. That fact has not emerged from the debate. There have been cuts everywhere else. The Government's amendment makes sense and the Government's case has been properly presented. I have no difficulty in supporting the amendment.

6.13 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I do not complain that the Foreign Secretary did not see fit to allow me to intervene during his speech, or that he could not do so. I put one question to him in the hope that the Minister of State will answer it when he replies. I think that the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris), who was kind enough to give way to me, shares some of my worries. The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) has worries, which are shared by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Dowd). What will happen when private finance is inserted into the system? It seems that neither the BBC nor the Government will have any control over that finance.

Let us suppose that the private finance initiative is invaded by Rupert Murdoch or by controversial Arab funds. What then happens to the reputation of the World Service? It is no good saying that we can have an end-user certificate. There will be no control. There could be takeovers. After two or three transfers down the line, the World Service could fall into hands that would horrify those of us who sit on green Benches.

I see that the Foreign Secretary has escaped—he has left the Chamber—doubtless for good reasons. I put my question bluntly to the Minister of State. Will he use 30 seconds, a minute or whatever it takes to set out the Government's contingency plans, if the PFI fell into hands that neither side of the House would deem to be satisfactory, in responding to a basic trust that is at the very core of the World Service?

That is all that I have to say.

6.16 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Not for the first time, I find myself in considerable sympathy with the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), for whom I have enormous regard. If anybody deserves the title "honourable", he does.

I am grateful, of course, to my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary for his assurance, and for the personal care and attention that he has devoted to the BBC World Service. Not for half a second do I question his commitment, still less his integrity. I am troubled, however, about the injection of private finance, and potential reliance on it for the BBC. It is almost a contradiction in terms.

I say to my right hon. Friend the Minister of State that some things should rightly and properly be funded from the public purse. I can think of nothing higher in that category than the promotion and protection of Britain's interests abroad.

It is a great pity that the Foreign Office had to suffer any cuts in the recent expenditure round. This may not be a fashionable view in all quarters of the House, but I believe that the Foreign Office serves the United Kingdom extremely well. Of all the diplomats whom I have met during my travels abroad, I can remember only about three or four who I felt did not measure up to the job. It is a pity that cuts are directed at the Foreign Office at any time. All our ambassadors should represent the best of our country, and be able to do so without looking over their shoulders every second for auditors.

In the British Council and the World Service, we have two of the most cost-effective general ambassadors that any nation could possibly have. The World Service is renowned for its quality. We have heard anecdotes from Members on both sides of the House, and perhaps, Madam Deputy Speaker, you will allow me to contribute mine.

Some years ago, I was asked, after a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference in Australia, whether I would go to the Solomon Islands, way out in the south Pacific. I thought that it sounded terribly romantic, and was most eager to go. It was a most moving experience. I found a country that, although very poor, was rich in the personalities of its people.

What moved me most was going to a couple of schools there and speaking to fifth and sixth formers. They were remarkably well informed and knew the names of more British Cabinet Ministers than most fifth and sixth formers in my constituency would know. When I asked why, the answer was interesting, as they did not get newspapers, which were generally a week or fortnight old when they arrived from Australia, and their own pidgin English papers concentrated almost entirely on local affairs. Nevertheless, they were well-informed young people. The answer was that they listened regularly to the BBC World Service. From that, they had derived a voracious appetite for knowledge and information, and good basic information about the world in which they lived, and particularly about this country. They had a great admiration and respect for this country. I could not help wondering as I listened to them whether we entirely deserved that, but that is another story.

If I needed an illustration of the worth of the World Service, I found it in the Solomon Islands. I found it, too, from talking to people from eastern Europe, when involved in a committee on human rights, which was allowed, for the first time, into the Soviet Union in its dying days by Mr. Gorbachev. We talked to people

[Sir Patrick Cormack]

there—Jews and Christians—whom we sought to help. To them, the BBC World Service, often listened to in conditions of extreme danger, had been a lifeline. One found the same in Romania, the former East Germany and in other countries. It really would be quite wrong if anything were done to jeopardise that magnificent service.

I was grateful for the assurance that none of the foreign language services will be threatened, and I sincerely hope that my right hon. Friend will, when he replies, be able to reinforce that assurance. I would be most grateful for my right hon. Friend's attention, which is difficult at the moment, as my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Surrey (Sir M. Grylls) seems to have engaged him in conversation.

I should also be grateful for another assurance. Important though the foreign language services are, the English language service is of paramount importance, and I hope that nothing will be done to jeopardise the breadth or depth of its coverage. It is the way in which many people learn the English language. It is through the World Service that many become acquainted with our literature, our culture, our politics and our democratic system. It would be most unfortunate if there were any contraction in that service.

This has been a useful debate. It has shown that every hon. Member who has spoken, on both sides of the House, is full of admiration for, and totally committed to, the World Service. I truly believe that that commitment is shared by the Government, and hope that it will be reinforced in the speech that my right hon. Friend will make shortly.

6.23 pm

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack), who encapsulated the mood of the House.

I owe a double debt to the BBC World Service. I worked there briefly, and it is part of my journalistic formation. But, more importantly, I remember being arrested some 14 years ago by the Polish communist secret police and being taken away to an obscure gaol in Warsaw, a very frightened young man taking support—financial and other—to the underground trade union, Solidarity.

After a couple of days, my fellow inmates brought me the news that I was on the BBC. I was immensely relieved that my name had been made known—it was not just the vanity of a would-be politician at having his name in the headlines—and that it had been uttered by the BBC. For some reason, I did not think that anything odd could befall me. That is the extraordinary power that that institution has had for many years.

Although the giant totalitarianisms of communism and fascism are no longer with us, there are still many dictatorships around the world. There are still many brave men and women, people of all parties—this is not a party political debate—and persuasions who go momentarily to lend a hand and give some help, and the BBC World Service provides a lifeline, in English and, indeed, other languages.

Concern has been expressed at the decision, some 45 years after General De Gaulle made his famous appeal to the French from the studios of the BBC to rally against Nazism, that the BBC, acting in advance of the budgetary pressure and cuts that were about to be imposed, dropped its broadcasts to France. That, perhaps, is no great loss, but around the world the French language remains a powerful instrument of communication. I hope that the BBC will continue to broadcast in French to Africa, south-east Asia and elsewhere where French is spoken.

Referring now to my time as a journalist, I wish to reinforce the point that has been made by hon. Members on both sides of the House—that the BBC is an extraordinarily mean and tight ship. One could mount a different debate complaining about the often harsh treatment of the many foreign language journalists who work at the BBC. They are placed on short-term contracts. Their futures are not secure. If they bring their families with them, they can make no long-term plans. That, perhaps, is a debate for another occasion.

The fundamental point about that extraordinary institution in the Strand is that it is the most remarkable repository of knowledge about the world. It would be a shame if any cuts reduced—for the whole of the country and, indeed, the Government and all of us who are interested in foreign affairs—that extraordinary source of knowledge.

Many hon. Members have raised concerns about privatisation. The right hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) talked endlessly about business values, about running the BBC as a tight business. I found the description of the BBC as simply another profit centre regrettable.

Although, in essence, jamming no longer exists—we can go through it or overcome it technologically—there is a more modern form, where one seeks not to prevent but to buy or financially control the means of news distribution. We have seen the example in Asia of Mr. Murdoch succumbing—kow-towing—to pressure from the dictators of Peking to remove the BBC World Television Service from his satellite, and that is extremely worrying.

I hope that the Minister will give a very strong commitment. We have heard a concession, although I am not sure whether it is real or whether it is a phantom—one of those things hissing through the ether. I am not sure whether the Secretary of State really gave the pledge that has been called for by most hon. Members, which has been called for in much press comment, which much of the country demands, and which, in the interests of Britain, democracy and information, the world thoroughly needs.

6.29 pm

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): It is difficult at this stage of the debate to find something new to say. It is remarkable that hon. Members on both sides of the House have been as fulsome in their praise of the BBC World Service as they have. But perhaps it is not remarkable, because the organisation is held in great esteem by all hon. Members. We have all benefited from its services when travelling abroad.

Therefore, it is with some disappointment that we have to have a debate on cuts in the World Service, rather than on a more positive basis. However, we can use this debate, as we have done, to laud its many fine services, which are widely appreciated throughout the world.

In an intervention, I told the Secretary of State that I was concerned to have clarified the apparent increase in the PFI to £30 million, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) has just referred. It is important that the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the right hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), should clarify that when he replies. Many of us were concerned that there was a contradiction in terms in what was being done in respect of the BBC World Service over a very short period.

As I said, as recently as August 1995, the joint World Service and Foreign Office capital review body suggested that a further £5 million of capital spending should be made available to the World Service specifically for the new transmitter in Oman. Within weeks, the Budget comes along, the whole thing changes, cuts are announced, and only by utilising the PFI, which, as has been said several times, is not a cost-free initiative, can such capital expenditure now be achieved.

The Foreign Secretary was rather disingenuous when he referred to what the managing director, Mr. Sam Younger, had said about looking positively at the PFI, because, as far as I recall, he failed to say that Mr. Younger also said that he was

"greatly concerned at the possible implications for our"—

the BBC World Service—

"programme services of the cuts planned over the next two years".

That is a much more telling comment than the previous one.

The Secretary of State also failed to give due emphasis when quoting the BBC's chairman, Marmaduke Hussey, as saying:

"We will certainly bend all our energies to exploring the suggested approaches. But we are concerned that if we are not successful, there will inevitably be a reduction in our range of programme services."

Most people who have contributed or listened to the debate will accept that programme reductions are inevitable as a result of the cuts that have been announced. It in no way serves the Government's argument to say that such cuts are a small proportion of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's cuts as a whole, so the Government are being kinder to the World Service, which everyone loves because it is a cuddly organisation with which everyone is friendly and with which everyone likes to snuggle up in bed. That may well be the case, particularly for people in some of the more remote parts of the world to whom the World Service can be a lifeline in many ways. But as far as hon. Members are concerned, the World Service requires proper funding in order to enable it to continue the job that it has done so effectively.

Just how effective the organisation is was clear to me as a member of the Public Accounts Committee receiving the National Audit Office's report at the end of last year. The report essentially commented on the progress made since the Public Accounts Committee hearing which representatives of the World Service had attended in 1992. The report was clear in its praise for the cost-saving measures that had been carried out, for the advances made in technology, and so on.

On the one hand, the Government praise the organisation, but on the other hand say that, unless it uses the private finance initiative, they will not allow it to expand. Therefore, we need clarification, as does the World Service, of what the £30 million involves. I am particularly concerned about that. It will involve leaseback for the World Service, but what sort of costs will that entail? It is not clear to me just how that would sit with the commitments that the World Service may already have in terms of capital spending. I hope that we can have some clarification on that.

I hope that the Minister of State will also clarify some of the answers that he gave during Foreign Office questions six days ago. On that occasion, he said:

"The effect of the PFI . . . will be clearer once the World Service completes its discussions with the private sector."—[*Official Report*, 10 January 1996; Vol. 269, c. 201.]

In a sense, that is self-evident. It will be clearer, but that is not exactly helpful at this stage. There will clearly be substantial start-up costs and other operating consequences for any PFI project. The World Service needs a commitment that its operating budget will be protected. We have not had that today.

The Minister also said that real terms funding had been increased by 50 per cent. since 1979. That was the result of the previous Prime Minister's commitment to invest in an audibility programme—which, incidentally, has been praised again in the NAO report—but that also impacts on the joint capital spending review which was carried out which seems to have been jettisoned within weeks of being published.

We know that that is the result of the Government's short-term interests and their need to cut public expenditure so as to enable them to cut taxes. We had one cut in November, and doubtless we shall have a further cut next November if the Government can stagger on that long. The World Service and many other areas of public expenditure are suffering for short-term gain, as perceived by the Government. That in itself is reprehensible.

Many people throughout the world benefit daily from the BBC World Service. It would be a tragedy if some of those people were denied its services, which may be their lifeline. They may mean the difference between health and sickness, survival and death. The World Service contributes to such essential projects as AIDS education, reproductive health, women's education, and even, as has been mentioned, the dangers of land mines and how to avoid their horrific effects if disturbed. Such issues are of daily importance to people in many far-flung parts of the world, and that is widely recognised.

Equally, we need answers from the Government not just on which languages will be cut but on what people in far-flung parts of the world will do if the World Service is no longer available to them. Should they tune into Voice of America, Radio France International or Radio Moscow? I do not know what stations may or may not be available, but where there is an alternative, the BBC World Service is still everyone's first choice, and the Government must give a commitment to ensure that the funding is there to make it possible for such services to remain for people to whom they mean much more than many in Britain appreciate.

Arguments in favour of the World Service have come from both sides of the House this evening. Let the Minister of State now give the sort of commitments for which all hon. Members have been looking in the debate.

6.37 pm

Ms Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): It is clear that the Opposition have been fully justified in the choice of today's debate, not least because we have forced the Government into giving the House assurances about the future funding of the BBC World Service, and we have caused them to think again. I rejoice in the fact that we have had some measure of success in that respect and I assure the Government, in turn, that we shall continue to monitor the matter closely because we are anxious that the World Service should be able not just to continue to do its valuable work for the future but to expand its services.

Many powerful speeches have been made by hon. Members on both sides of the House. There has been a great deal of similarity in the contributions, all of which have shown clearly the great esteem in which the World Service is held. We have also been reminded that many well-known people outside the House and outside the country have had great reason to be thankful to the BBC World Service. Mention was made of President Mandela and the Burmese opposition leader, to whom I wish to pay special tribute. As *The Economist* put it just a week ago, if high-class endorsements were all that were needed to ensure the BBC World Service's survival, it would be in no difficulty whatever.

The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) talked about the Government being in the dock for what was really a small amount of money. That point was also made effectively by the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) during Foreign Office questions, when he said that the BBC World Service should not be

"jeopardised for the sake of the price of a mile of motorway".—[*Official Report*, 10 January 1996; Vol. 269, c. 202.]

I think that we would all strongly endorse that sentiment.

Grave reservations have been expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) and other Labour Members about the way in which the Government have approached the issue. We have been concerned not only about the substance of the cuts, but about the procedure involved. We say strongly that the Government were wrong to interfere in the triennium settlement in the way that they did. That was a dangerous precedent that must have lost the Government a great deal of trust. The points that were made about that settlement by my hon. Friends, including my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Dowd), were well taken.

Many concerns have been expressed about the effects on the BBC's operating budget, especially in 1997-98. Although the Government have tried to deal with that in their concession today concerning the private finance initiative, I recommend them to read *Hansard* and consider carefully the reservations expressed by all hon. Members about that initiative in relation to the BBC World Service. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have powerfully expressed concerns about that initiative's use, especially if there is any suspicion that the BBC's independence will be compromised. We shall monitor that matter closely in future months. The Government must not forget that important point. It would be good if the Minister dealt with some of those concerns in his winding-up speech.

Many hon. Members have pointed out that the cuts about which we are concerned today come on top of other cuts. The hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris) reminded us of his early-day motion two years ago, which attracted a great deal of cross-party support in the House. Concern was expressed then about the cuts that the World Service was facing and, since then, the Government have tried to impose further cuts. That renders many of the Government's statements about their support for the BBC World Service unconvincing.

It is true, as my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston said, that there was welcome investment in the service in the early 1980s, but we are concerned that that investment has been undermined by the Budget announcement of cuts. This is the worst and most inappropriate time to undermine the BBC World Service because, more than ever, investment in new technology will be necessary.

An interesting article in the *Financial Times* yesterday talked about

"A renaissance of radio for emerging markets"

and

"the launch of . . . three digital satellites to broadcast hundreds of high quality radio channels"

to parts of the world that had not previously received such high-quality broadcasts. Labour Members and, I believe, many Conservative Members, want the BBC World Service to be at the forefront of those developments, and not to be put in the position of having to catch up subsequently, which would be difficult.

Hon. Members have said that the BBC World Service has a dual role: it brings great political prestige to Britain in the way in which it portrays our country, and, as our motion points out, it promotes tremendous "respect and goodwill" for Britain throughout the world. We also know, however, that it is valued by business interests, which feel that it is terribly important in promoting both the English language and an awareness of our country as one to do business with in future.

We pay tribute to the way in which the World Service has proved itself responsive to international events and crises. It doubled its output to former Yugoslavia during the recent events there, including FM re-broadcasts to Sarajevo. That work was important.

I was glad that mention was made of the importance of the BBC's English language service and of the English language teaching for which the BBC World Service is responsible. About 5.5 million people around the world sit down and study English as a result of BBC World Service broadcasts. Those people do not tune in casually; they are dedicated listeners who use the BBC World Service to learn English. The BBC World Service is an important part of the English language teaching industry. If one includes such things as that industry's publishing spin-offs, it constitutes one of the country's 10 largest invisible earners. That is a dramatic figure, which we should take into account in considering the World Service and its activities.

English language teaching through the World Service has some important achievements to its credit, including a tremendous increase in English use in the countries of central and eastern Europe and in parts of the former Soviet Union. We should not forget the importance of those countries to us in future and their commercial importance—we should be keen to emphasise that.

Many hon. Members have referred to the importance, and the difficulties at times, of our relationship with the Republic of China. I welcome the fact that the BBC World Service has reached agreement with many provincial stations in China, which reach out to a huge population, on the English language teaching work that the BBC World Service undertakes, yet we know that the Government have not been as supportive of the service as they should have been. I understand that the previous Foreign Secretary said that there would be a push to English language teaching, but, in the end, the push that was envisaged a couple of years ago during the London conference on Britain in the world did not happen. Again, we would like to investigate that for the future.

The BBC World Service's education programmes are vital—I refer to health education programmes to the third world in particular; the missing persons help line, which has been operating in Somalia; advice to people on how to dispose of land mines, which cause many tragic problems in the world; and how to feed children in conditions of poverty or near poverty. All that BBC education work is important and well respected, as, of course, is the impartiality and the independence of the BBC World Service's advice.

I endorse the comment that the BBC World Service is a world leader—it is a world beater and it leaves its competitors far behind. It deserves better treatment than the shabby uncertainties that have been forced on it by the Government. I am glad that, as a result of the debate, the Government have at least had partially to change their mind. We shall not hesitate to draw that victory to the nation's attention. Having said that, our motion corresponds closely to all the points that have been made by virtually all hon. Members in the debate. I therefore urge the maximum amount of support for our motion in the Division Lobby tonight.

6.48 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): As the House will agree, we have had a lively debate. Above all, it has confirmed yet again the esteem and affection in which the House holds the BBC World Service.

It is worth repeating some of the good news. As we have all agreed, the BBC is a great national asset, and it has flourished as never before under the present Government. World Service output is at record levels: the service now broadcasts in 42 languages—that includes the core 24-hour English language service—and its programmes are re-broadcast by more than 900 radio stations world wide. As we have heard, it estimates that its world audience consists of some 133 million—although the figure could well be higher—which is more than twice the size of the audience of its nearest competitor.

That is a great success story for the World Service and for Britain. The Government have continued to provide strong financial support, because we fully recognise the high value and quality of the service and the important role that it plays in overseas representation. It has built up a reputation that is the envy of other broadcasters. That contrasts with the position at the end of the 1970s, when there was a critical need for the new investment in the World Service that we provided.

Funding had stagnated for some years when the Government made those investments—£166 million of capital up to 1991 to boost audibility, and £29 million for a new relay station in Thailand that should come on stream later this year. Funding has increased by 50 per cent. in real terms since we came to power, and those investments have enabled the BBC to achieve record audiences. BBC World Television News is available to 43 million homes and 111 countries, at the cost of not a penny to the taxpayer.

I hope that the debate has laid to rest many concerns that have been expressed in recent weeks, as well as some ill-informed comments. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary pointed out, the BBC is operating in a fast-changing world; we must look to the future, and ensure a sustainable and forward-looking basis for its operations. We all agree that the World Service and its commercially funded companion services in the BBC world wide add up to a uniquely varied and effective overseas broadcasting operation, and we all agree that that should continue. If the debate has helped to clarify some of the complexities of the broadcasting scene and its funding and to set the Government's overall approach to the World Service in perspective, it has served a useful purpose. On 13 December, I chaired the annual ministerial meeting with the World Service: I found that a useful and positive occasion, and greatly enjoyed the discussion.

Let me now deal with some of the detailed issues raised by right hon. and hon. Members. Let me assure my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) that there is no question of privatising the World Service. The private finance initiative provides a new way of funding capital expenditure by making greater use of private sector expertise and money, but under the PFI the World Service remains in control of both programme content and programme distribution.

Mr. Galloway: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hanley: No. The hon. Gentleman had an opportunity to speak, and I now have very little time.

The World Service is the customer; the private sector assumes more of the risk that is inherent in capital projects. Under the PFI, there will be a contract for each item, the terms of that contract will have to be adhered to and actions will follow any breach.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) mentioned the Arabic television service. That service is funded commercially, not by licence fee or grant in aid. The BBC has made it clear that, when it signs such contracts, it must retain absolute editorial independence and control, even when partnerships with local broadcasters are involved. I understand that the BBC is currently investigating interruptions to the Arabic service; in the light of its findings, it must decide how best to take matters forward with its partners. There is no connection with the PFI or privatisation of transmission, and involvement of private finance and expertise in World Service capital programmes will not in any way affect the service's control over content or distribution.

Let me say to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) that most forms of international broadcasting depend on a local partner. The only exception is short-wave radio. There can be no guarantee that particular partnerships will always work out; those partnerships are a matter for the BBC. I know that the BBC will always place its editorial integrity above all other considerations, which is entirely right.

In one of his knockabout interventions, the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) said that there was a knife out for the World Service in the Foreign Office. He

[Mr. Hanley]

explained that any reductions that had been made under successive Governments had been made by some mandarin in the Foreign Office. That is a pretty funny argument. Next year—I can give the figures for all three years if the hon. Gentleman wishes—the World Service current-cost reduction is 0 per cent.; that for the diplomatic wing is 4.1 per cent. In 1997-98, the reduction in current expenditure for the World Service is 1.7 per cent.; that for the diplomatic wing is 3.3 per cent. In 1998-99, the reduction for the diplomatic wing is 4 per cent., against yet another 0 per cent. reduction in World Service expenditure. If someone in the Foreign Office is out to get the World Service, I am afraid that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West would probably say that that person is not doing his job.

We have preserved expenditure on the World Service as far as possible. We know how valuable it is: that is why we tried to preserve the triennium system, which was mentioned by several hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms Quin). I understand the concern that was expressed about that three-year agreement. One reason why the Government have gone to such lengths to minimise reductions in the World Service allocation for 1996-97 is that we recognise the existence of the triennium. Nevertheless, there could never be any absolute guarantee of funding, three years ahead, for the World Service alone, of all public bodies. As it is, the service has fared a good deal better than not just the diplomatic wing but every wing of the Foreign Office. That says a great deal not only for it, but for the way in which the Government have cared for it.

I was sad that the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Miss Nicholson) introduced an element of exaggeration to the debate. Opposition Members forecast possible cuts in one or other language service, which I suppose was reasonable within the bounds of debate. Those forecasts were not correct, but they were reasonable. From the hon. Lady, however, we heard phrases such as "the silencing of the World Service" and "the withering and dying of the World Service". That is way over the top. The hon. Lady must have taken lessons from those masters of political hyperbole among the Liberal Democrats.

Miss Emma Nicholson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Lady did not allow any interventions.

The hon. Lady has had many friends among the Conservative party. I was saddened by her statement that she regarded certain Ministers as

"weak-willed, blinkered and ostrich-minded".

That is not true, and it was sad to hear it from the hon. Lady so soon after she had been given so much support by, in particular, Ministers at the Ministry of Defence and at the Foreign Office.

In fact, the hon. Lady published her speech in advance. It was fascinating to note that she omitted two paragraphs. One read:

"The BBC, of course, has its faults as well as its virtues. While the World Service is cut to the bone, there's fat elsewhere in an over-sized, bureaucratic, administratively top-heavy organisation, with too many advisory bodies."

That is how the hon. Lady described the BBC in her printed speech. Perhaps her courage deserted her—or perhaps that was another example of a Liberal Democrat speech in which an hon. Member says one thing in the House and leaves the real meat for distribution to the constituencies. She left out another paragraph, and I am sure that hon. Members would love to read it. I was saddened by what she had to say. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. It is becoming impossible to hear what the Minister has to say. I address my remarks to people beyond the Gangway.

Mr. Hanley: The debate has shown a sustained record of Government support for the World Service. It has shown a World Service in flourishing condition. It has also shown the complexities and changing nature of the broadcasting scene and the need for fresh thinking, of which there has been absolutely no sign from the Opposition. Admittedly, the Opposition now accept that the private finance initiative may have something. The BBC must move with the times if it is to keep its place at the head of the field, and we are determined to give it every help in doing so.

The Government have produced the necessary investment for the World Service, which has freed the BBC to compete in a far wider range of overseas activities and to increase its representation. Of course, we must continue the drive for greater efficiency and we want to involve private sector finance and expertise more closely, subject to the BBC retaining complete control over its programming and distribution. The Government remain absolutely committed to the World Service and we intend to see it into the next century in the same flourishing condition that it enjoys today.

I thank my right hon. and hon. Friends for their contributions and for the care that they have shown for the World Service in our discussions over the past few months. I also thank many Opposition Members for their care and concern for the World Service and for what they say privately to us outside the Chamber about their admiration for the way that the Government have funded the World Service.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 291, Noes 310.

Division No. 24] **[7.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*

Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W. *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Cummings and Ms Ann Coffey.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William

Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Michael Bates.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House congratulates the BBC World Service on its international reputation for objective news and comment and records its appreciation of the valuable contribution it makes to promoting respect and good will for Britain; expresses its welcome for the 50 per cent. growth in real terms of its resources since 1979 as well as the significant increase in foreign language broadcasts over the same period; and shares Her Majesty's Government's determination to ensure that the World Service will continue to enjoy unrivalled success.

Training and Community Action

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): I have to inform the House that Madam Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

7.16 pm

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): I beg to move,

That this House believes that the Government has failed to offer all members of society the chance to participate in building future prosperity; further believes that the Government has failed to achieve the investment in skills the British people need; deplores the cuts that have been made to the budgets of training and enterprise councils and the abandonment of the community action programme; and calls on the Government to ensure the workforce is equipped with the skills and training necessary to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.

It gives me pleasure to move this motion at the beginning of the Year of Lifelong Learning. It is a great pity that the Government's major contribution to that year is to cut training and education budgets, thereby undermining the life chances of those for whom skilling and learning are crucial, because they provide them with the tools to be able to earn their living and to contribute to society. The Government's record of the past year has been shoddy: cuts and the closure of programmes. The budgets of training and enterprise councils were cut by £197 million, and the Government had the cheek to take part of that money, invest it elsewhere, and then claim that it represented an improvement in further education.

The November 1995 Budget announced a proposed cut in the departmental budget of 4 per cent., with £75 million taken from the training budget alone in the coming year. There was an interesting sleight of hand in the form of the announcement that there would be an increase in spending on training of £50 million over three years, but a one-year cut of £75 million. Three down and two up is the Government's usual cack-handed way of taking with one hand while pretending to give with the other.

In every single major area of Government training programmes there has been a reduction in funding, at a time when people who are unemployed and seeking work have been more desperate than ever for an improvement in the availability of the skills that they need. Seven hundred and thirty thousand young men and women between the ages of 16 and 25 have no job and no training and are not in any education place. Nearly 300,000 of them have been unemployed and without a place for more than six months.

Special needs training and education have been drastically affected. A recent report by the training and enterprise councils in the voluntary sector showed a general 10 per cent. cut in the number of starts for those with special needs in the past 12 months; in some parts of the country there have been cuts of a staggering 40 or 50 per cent.

The switch to outcome measures has provided an incentive not to get young people into work but to get them out of the dole queues and off the register, whatever the consequences in terms of failing to give them qualifications that would equip them with the portable knowledge and skills to be able to return, time and again, to the job market and take up paid places in work.

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): Why should the Government or the Conservative party take any lectures from the Labour party or from the Minister about the jobless and job opportunities when the hon. Gentleman's party wants to impose a social chapter on this country's employers?

Mr. Blunkett: I will tell the hon. Gentleman why they should take lectures. The Government have tripled the number of people who are unemployed, even on existing figures and by taking into account the 20 or 30 adjustments to the unemployment statistics and the way in which the Government have treated the training budget.

Mr. Sykes: What about the social chapter?

Mr. Blunkett: All we get is a very silly heckle of "What about the social chapter?" Unfortunately, even if we had signed the social chapter, it would not have protected us from the cuts and closures that the Government are inflicting on those seeking training and wanting work. The Minister—I nearly said the shadow Minister, seeing as I have been described as the Minister. The Government are so used to putting themselves in the place of the Opposition and thinking of us as the Government that it is quite hard not to predict too soon the outcome of the next election.

Mr. Sykes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blunkett: I will not give way again for the moment. I will make some progress.

I remind the House that on 7 January, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment was reported in a Sunday newspaper as having the cheek to say that getting a job made the unemployed happy. I thought that that showed the cheek of the devil for somebody who has been responsible in a Government who have accelerated unemployment over the years to the point where they can claim credit for a slight drop in the number registered as unemployed.

I return to the key issue of those with special needs who have been denied training and therefore the chance of a job because of cuts and closures. I return to the way in which the training and enterprise councils have been cut, the way in which the budget for training for the coming year has been reduced, and of course the way in which training has been switched to short-term rather than long-term provision to provide qualifications for life.

We need to debate a very serious issue. Are we a low-tech, low-wage, low added value economy that has short-term measures to get people off the dole queue, or are we a high-tech, high-wage and high-investment economy that skills people so that they are able to earn their living, add value at work to the amount that they are paid, contribute to society and, above all, have the knowledge-based skills to carry them through an ever insecure and uncertain jobs market?

The security that we can provide by equipping people with the ability to move from job to job and from workplace to workplace and to re-adapt several times in their working life is crucial to the future of Britain. That is why we are condemning the Government not only for the cuts that they have made but for the short-termism that underpins them.

If there is a reduction—the Government have reduced the budget for special needs training—in the long-term emphasis on gaining qualifications, people become equipped people only for further unemployment and

[Mr. Blunkett]

short-term relief. They end up being placed in a short-term, low-paid job only to find themselves back in the dole queue through a revolving door. That is obviously short-sighted and extremely unproductive for our needs as a nation.

Our emphasis on providing a stakeholder economy in a nation that pulls together—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] I hear some "Ahs" from Conservative Members. Our emphasis is on a stakeholder economy provided by the Labour party, rather than a Burger King economy provided by the Conservative party of fat cats and hot dogs instead of investment in long-term training and skills to enable people to do a job.

Comments that have been made on Grand Metropolitan remind me of the way in which the Government have undermined the careers service, which, as we have seen in south London, is crucial to training and employment.

Mr. Sykes: On the subject of burgers, the hon. Gentleman will know that there is a large manufacturer in my constituency that supplies various food chains with a specific product. People in my constituency have been guaranteed jobs because that company could not afford to build a factory in France due to the costs of the social chapter and the minimum wage. What did the company do? It doubled the production line in Scarborough instead, thus guaranteeing the jobs of my constituents. How does he answer that?

Mr. Blunkett: I do not need to answer it because it is patently obvious that companies which locate in France—companies have moved from Scotland to France as well as from France to Britain—have seen the value in France, Germany and Italy, as they do in the Pacific rim, of investment in long-term skills. If the answer to the question of whether we should invest in a knowledge-based, long-term skills economy of the 21st century is a Conservative Member saying that the Government's solution is to make our wages as low as possible in order to attract people to re-locate in Scarborough, the division between the two parties is clear.

The division lies between a vision of Britain at the cutting edge of the world economy being able to compete with the Pacific rim countries, and a country that is determined to be on the fringe of Europe—a kind of offshore, floating low-wage zone in which Ministers do not seem to have grasped the fact that the biggest change in the past decade has been a drop in the demand for unskilled labour and an increase in the demand for those who could add value through their skills in a high-tech, information and communications era.

Information and communications technology, and not the ability to fill tubs with mince, has to be the way forward for this country. Low wages will not get Britain out of economic recession. Investment in skills will put us ahead of the Germans, the South Koreans, the Taiwanese and the Singaporeans.

One need only ask the Deputy Prime Minister that. He flew to Singapore to find out how they do it, but the Leader of the Opposition had already been. One need only ask the Deputy Prime Minister, since last year, over the head of the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, he started to undertake a skills audit. One need only talk to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who made it absolutely clear on the Radio 4 programme "UKplc" at the end of 1995 that there had been years and years of under-investment in skills for the future of this country.

I suggest that Conservative Members listen to the Deputy Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer before yah-booing such future needs and skilling. Why has the Deputy Prime Minister undertaken a skills audit? Why is there universal acceptance that there is a major problem in the skills available in this country? Why did the survey, "Skill Needs in Britain", published in December, acknowledge that there had been a jump of 75 per cent. since 1994 in the number of companies in this country that perceive a skills gap?

That is not my perception or that of the Labour party. It is the perception of industry across the country. Furthermore, 43 per cent. perceived a shortfall in technology skills and 30 per cent. perceived a shortfall in basic manufacturing skills. We know that that is correct because the CBI has published a report, backed up by the Trades Union Congress, on the need to invest in a different sort of economy for a different millennium. The divide between the parties lies in the recognition of that need.

The report sneaked out by the Government in December, called "Lifelong Learning"—we obtained a copy and published it a fortnight before the Government released it—had only one thing going for it: it at least acknowledged that the Government were falling short of their own targets. Let me spell out some of the targets that have not been met. A total of 55 per cent. of our 17-year-olds stay on in full-time education. In France the figure is 87 per cent. and in Germany it is 93 per cent.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): They have higher unemployment.

Mr. Blunkett: So I presume that the higher the unemployment figure, the more people stay on in education. If that were true, at the height of the Conservative-engineered recession in the early 1990s, our nation would have had some of the best figures for those staying on. The number of those staying on at 16 fell last year. I assume that there is a corollary and that because the Government have made up work make schemes and are now prepared to cut them, we will see an increase next year in the number of young people staying on in full-time education.

Mr. Shaw: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blunkett: I certainly will because I would love to be enlightened on this intellectually robust point.

Mr. Shaw: When one compares France with the United Kingdom, surely one of the key points is that a young person in France stays unemployed for 22 months whereas, on average, a young person in the United Kingdom is likely to get a job after nine months. Is not one reason why the French young are so desperate to stay on in any form of education possible the fact that the minimum wage has prevented them from having opportunities for employment?

Mr. Blunkett: Intellectually, this would be a useful argument if it were not for the fact that in America, which

is used as the exemplar of right-wing market economics, there has been a minimum wage and it has not affected the number of young people obtaining jobs.

Mr. Shaw: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blunkett: No, because the hon. Gentleman's greatest contribution in the debate about France and Britain was to suggest that the harbour in Dover should be given away to the French. I suppose if proximity to France had enlightened the hon. Gentleman, he would have made a better contribution today.

Mr. Shaw: The hon. Gentleman has tunnel vision.

Mr. Blunkett: I like that joke about me having tunnel vision. That was very amusing and I will set my dog on the hon. Gentleman.

What about the targets that the Government set themselves? What about the 80 per cent. of young people who are to gain intermediate skills such as the GNVQ intermediate or five GCSEs at grades A to C by 1997? When it became clear that the Government were nowhere near that, the goalposts were changed and the target was set for the year 2000. It was also slightly adjusted and was made 85 per cent. for 19-year-olds. How are we doing at reaching that target? So far, we have managed to get two thirds of the way.

We have seen a similar shortfall in the number of adults receiving advanced qualifications below degree level such as the GNVQ advanced, BTEC national or A-levels. Britain has a figure of just over 40 per cent., whereas the Japanese attained the targets set by Britain 10 years ago. The Germans have exceeded the target and the French have a target of 80 per cent. by the year 2000, not 60 per cent., which is what we have set ourselves.

It is a sorry picture. There are targets that cannot be met and the Government are cutting back at the very time when those targets need to be attained. We have seen cuts in not only the training budget but in further and higher education. Fancy cutting two thirds of the capital budget over the next three years for the further education sector at the very time when we should be encouraging more young people to go into full-time education. Are we doing that? A few moments ago Conservative Members committed themselves to encouraging young people not to go into full-time education but to get the cheapest job possible on the ground that the more people who go into full-time education, the more desperate they must be. What a pathetic state we have reached.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): The hon. Gentleman referred to cuts. Will he join me in condemning the 25 per cent. cut-imposed on the action for community employment scheme in Northern Ireland? Does he agree that it is unmanageable and irresponsible to expect those cuts to be made by 31 March this year? Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Government would serve the community and the long-term unemployed better by increasing funding for those community projects and by properly supervising the 240 of them across Northern Ireland, to ensure that the skill level of the long-term unemployed is raised and that the necessary community services provided for the needy can be maintained?

Mr. Blunkett: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. The link between providing real experience, community skills and training is critical. As I shall show, the Government have disregarded the idea that placing people in work and on community experience is good for them because it is too expensive. Accelerating closure demoralises those at the sharp end—those on the schemes—and undermines the confidence of providers who believe that they can be let down by the Government abandoning them at any moment.

The OECD recently put us at 18th out of 25 in the skills attained by our people as a whole. The World Competitive Forum put us 24th in terms of people skills and 35th in educational attainment. Again, Conservative Members are having a little chuckle. I do not think that there is much to laugh at.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): We are not talking about everybody's children.

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, as my hon. Friend reminds me, some people's children are doing all right because they can be supported and encouraged. We are talking all the time about helping those who are least able to help themselves. That is what one-nation Britain is all about. It is not just about looking after an elite and patting on the back those who happen to have had private education or who can succeed because they are funded through higher education. It is about ensuring that we look after those with no prospects such as the 700,000 to whom I referred earlier, the 280,000 under-25s who have been out of work for over six months, the 443,000 adults who have been out of work for over two years and the 750,000 who have been unemployed for more than a year. Those are the issues that we should be debating. Tonight's debate is important not just because it is about the future of Britain's economy, crucial though that is, but because it is about the well-being of individuals. If we are to have social cohesion as well as economic prosperity, we need to provide opportunities for every young person so that they are not on the streets or lying in bed but in work, doing work.

There are some important schemes. We agree with the modern apprenticeships and the accelerated apprenticeships. The programme to encourage firms to become investors in people is crucial, but instead of 8 per cent. we should aim for 80 per cent. of firms to become involved in that. We should encourage partnerships and develop the best of business partnerships from school through to work with local authorities. That has been done in Leeds by Leeds city council, the Benefits Agency and the training and enterprise council. We need positive moves to use the resources at our disposal to encourage and support people in their endeavour to find work. We are not talking about punishment or the jobseeker's allowance, which will be debated in the House tomorrow, or about threatening people or introducing a project work scheme that is deliberately and calculatedly designed to provide a shoddy and unacceptable alternative.

On 10 March last year the community action programme was supposed to be the great programme for the future. On that day, the Secretary of State's predecessor, the then Secretary of State for Employment, said—this was one of his most positive moves—

> "Over the next three years we are planning to extend the successful community action programme, which provides work experience and a route back to jobs for long-term unemployed people. It was due to end next year but we shall now provide 40,000 opportunities a year for the next three years."

[Mr. Blunkett]

That lasted only eight months. The Budget then overtook it and the Government changed their mind and abandoned the scheme. We must examine why that happened. In putting forward the project work scheme, the Government claimed that it would represent value for money and be a new idea. They said that the pilot schemes would provide a better alternative than schemes previously in place, and that the project work scheme would be a boon for those who had been out of work. It does not look that way when we examine the briefings given to Ministers.

One briefing note was entitled:

"Briefing for Ministers on the Budget. Requiring activity pilots: lines to take."

The advice given on the project work scheme was:

"This approach is new and will not be cheap. We do not throw money away on programmes that do not work."

I shall examine that advice in terms of the £98 million that was spent in 1994-95 on the community action programme, and compare it with the advice in the same briefing note to Ministers, which describes the programme as "community action closure". Under the heading,

"Questions that Ministers might be asked",

it says:

"Why are you closing community action when it has been such a success?"

and advises that the Minister answer:

"You will be aware that all Government Departments' budgets have been under very close scrutiny this year. It was quite clear that money would not be available for community action to continue at current levels. It was generally accepted that community action could not remain viable as a national programme if places were cut further, and closure, leading to the provision of its cheaper alternative, was seen as the preferred option."

That note reveals that finding a cheaper alternative was the most important priority and that the prime decision to cut community action was being taken not because the programme was not working—the Government proclaimed that it was and said last March that they would expand it—but as a straight budgetary cut.

The next question in the briefing is even more revealing:

"I know that the public position is that recruitment stops after 29 December but should we really continue with referrals up until then?"

The crucial answer is:

"Yes. Community action has been a popular and effective programme, and it is important that it is run down and closed in an orderly way. Money is available for this run down and it is important that we spend this on continuing to help as many people as possible in the interim."

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): I apologise to my hon. Friend for interrupting his flow. Is he directly quoting or paraphrasing? If he is directly quoting the advice of Government officials to help Ministers answer questions that may be asked, the line that they take is familiar to those of us who have been Ministers.

Mr. Blunkett: They are direct quotations from a document that briefs Ministers, and they show clearly the thinking behind what was going on. The advice was not terribly wise, but nevertheless it was given to Ministers, which is why the Government are gradually grinding to a standstill after 17 years. I shall not quote the rest of the document—[Hon. Members: "Go on."] I shall quote just one more question and answer. The question is whether work of value to the community would now be carried out, and the wonderful answer is:

"Community action was always primarily about helping people to find jobs"—

wait for this—

"not creating useful work opportunities for the sake of it."

No wonder I was intervened on.

An article in a Sunday newspaper on 7 January gave the game away on how the Government regard those schemes. It quoted the Minister as dismissing placing people in community programmes as being some kind of alternative to the makeweight that those pilot schemes are all about.

We are discussing a programme of cutbacks in training, the abandonment of community action programmes and a belief that a cheap alternative to programmes that have worked must be put in place. The Government have introduced change after change, which has disrupted not only the poor devils trying to get work or return to work but those desperate to provide that work. It has disrupted those in the community who set up and worked on those schemes. It undermines training and enterprise councils' programmes and programmes for young people as well as old.

What sort of Government proclaim in the Budget that they care about the long-term unemployed and then cut the training for work programme by 15 per cent., after an 18 per cent. cut in the previous year's estimated budget—£574 million cut to £488 million? What sort of Government pare back youth training, reducing the unit cost from £32 last year to £28 this year, having reduced it from an average unit cost of £50 four years ago? It is mean, petty and short-sighted—short-termism of the worst order.

No wonder Conservative Members defend Burger King. That is exactly what their Government are like. They seek the lowest possible pay with the least possible investment in the future. They will be swept aside because we talk of giving everyone a stake in society.

7.46 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"welcomes the fall in unemployment and rise in employment that have enabled more people to share in the benefits of economic growth; supports the Government's determination to give unemployed people the help they need to find work; and welcomes the Government's initiatives to raise standards of education and training and enhance the nation's competitiveness.".

I am indebted to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) for giving me so early in the new year a chance not only to set out for the House the Government's achievements in constructive and effective action to help unemployed people back to work but, more importantly, to explain to him and his hon. Friends a few facts of life. Disappointingly, all that we heard from him was the usual catalogue of woes, the usual implicit demands for more money, regardless of circumstances, and the usual refusal to face up to the consequences for

employment of his policies to embrace the social chapter and a national minimum wage. As usual, he refused to recognise the fact that, next year, investment in education will be £878 million and we shall provide an extra £30 million for the careers service. Our training strategy, as laid out in the White Papers on competitiveness, is backed with £300 million of new money for real investment and is getting results.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): Will the Minister give way?

Mrs. Shephard: I shall give way in a moment.

The hon. Gentleman also refuses to accept simple facts, such as the fact that this country has only 5.7 per cent. of its work force on short-term contracts, whereas France and Germany have double that number and Spain has more than 30 per cent. It is also sad that he spent half an hour talking Britain down. He spoke of world economic forums. The so-called findings of the World Competitive Forum, whoever that is, are at odds with recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development reports.

The OECD puts Britain second only to Denmark among European Union countries; on graduation rates, in the top five; and on spending per student, the highest in the European Union. During 1995, the OECD praised the increased number of young people obtaining good qualifications, the upgrading of labour force skills levels, the rapid take-up of general national vocational qualifications, the introduction of modern apprenticeships, the success of training and enterprise councils and the substantial rise in participation rates in education and training post-16 over the past decade. Of course, the hon. Gentleman does not wish to mention any of that. No wonder he asked for enlightenment. He thought that he had found it in a stolen document.

Mrs. Prentice: The Secretary of State mentioned both the careers service and the training and enterprise councils. The young people of south London first lost South Thames training and enterprise council because of the debacle there and are now waiting for a careers service to be established on 1 April. Grand Metropolitan has received a spurious title of preferred bidder status from the Secretary of State, despite a much better, well-thought-out bid by local authorities. Exactly what guidance will she give young people in south London about where they should go post-16?

Mrs. Shephard: I am confident that the well-resourced education and further education sectors in south London will be able to provide for the needs of the constituents of the hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice). I am also confident that there will be a good, effective careers service in place.

Governments cannot create jobs; businesses do. What Governments can do is to create the conditions for healthy economic growth and get rid of unnecessary legislative burdens that would deter employers from recruiting additional people as sales and output rise.

Only Opposition Members would launch a debate on employment that ignores the economic facts of life. Only they could ignore the unmistakable successes of the past three years: steadily falling unemployment; growth in jobs; a healthy flow of inward investment; and the lowest level of industrial disputes since records began. That, of course, is because they do not like to hear about success.

When the economy began to recover from recession in 1992, what did we hear from the Opposition? We heard that Europe, and Britain with it, faced a period of growth in joblessness. For Europe as a whole, that prediction has proved uncomfortably close to the truth, but for Britain it has proved wrong. Of course, we heard from Opposition Members that Britain, like the rest of Europe, faced permanently high unemployment. What did the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) warn us in his best sepulchral tones? He said:

"both unemployment and inflation are likely to rise".—[*Official Report*, 24 September 1992; Vol. 212, c. 94.]

He was wrong again on both counts.

There are now nearly 750,000 fewer people out of work and unemployment has fallen for 27 months in a row—it was down another 20,000 last month alone.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): Before the right hon. Lady seeks to take credit for the fall in unemployment, such as it has been, is she aware that the cause of that fall has nothing to do with the Government's employment or training programmes and everything to do with their failure to achieve the linchpin of their economic policy, which was to maintain our position in the exchange rate mechanism at a highly overvalued rate? If the Government had succeeded, none of what she now claims would have occurred. Does she accept that?

Mrs. Shephard: I expect that the hon. Gentleman would like to say something about his party's policy ambiguities in respect of the single currency. No doubt he will come to that when he winds up.

Mr. Meacher: Answer the question.

Mrs. Shephard: I am about to do so. It is the Government's labour market reforms and sound economic policies that have caused unemployment to fall faster and further than in other European Union countries. If the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) does not want to take my word for that, as he patently does not, let him take that of the OECD.

Of course the recession years hit Britain; they hit everyone. Unemployment, at around 8 per cent., is still too high, but unemployment in Britain is lower than in Germany, where it is 8.5 per cent.; well below that of France and Italy, where more than 11 per cent. are out of work; and spectacularly lower than in Spain, Europe's last socialist stronghold, where the social chapter and statutory national minimum wage of the kind proposed by the Labour party have created unemployment of 22 per cent. That is what I think is meant by a stakeholder society: regulation piled on regulation; industry held back by the trade unions; bureaucrats controlling every aspect of people's lives; and one in five people out of work, as in socialist Spain—a stake right through the heart of British enterprise and opportunity.

The reforms of the past 16 years have transformed Britain's labour market. Job growth between 1979 and 1989 was among the fastest in Europe—higher than in France, Italy or Germany. Three times as many new jobs were created in those 10 years as in the previous 10 years. Already, since 1992, more than 500,000 more jobs have been created and unemployment has fallen by nearly

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750,000. Every region of Britain and section of society is benefiting. We have fewer men out of work, fewer women out of work, and fewer long-term unemployed.

Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe (Bradford, South): It is interesting to hear the Minister recount those figures about how good everything is. Why is it that in Bradford, one third of the population is on some form of income benefit? The Government are doing nothing to solve the problem of long-term unemployment.

Mrs. Shephard: As I have just said, every region of Britain, including the north, has benefited from the fall in unemployment. The north of England and Northern Ireland have the highest unemployment, but it is still lower than average unemployment in the European Union as a whole.

In the 1970s—the last time that the stakeholders ran Britain—the north-south divide was a reality. There is now a smaller gap between the regions with the best employment and those with the worst unemployment in Britain than in any other European Union country. The north-south divide was a reality in the 1970s. Unemployment in Scotland, Wales and northern England was well above that of more prosperous regions. Now unemployment in Wales is at the Great Britain average and in Scotland it is below average.

It would be interesting for Opposition Members to compare our regions with those of our European partners: Calais, for example, has unemployment of 16 per cent.; in Mecklenburg, it is over 18 per cent.; in southern Spain, one person in three is unemployed.

It is against that background, that change in the labour market, that good news—which I can see that Labour Members are delighted to hear—and that fall in unemployment, that we should set our changed priorities in help for unemployed people.

Priorities have to change with changing times, but the fundamental aim remains the same: to offer individual people the help that they need to get back to work as quickly as possible. It is the task of a responsible Government to give unemployed people that help. As the economic background changes, so the programmes must change to give people the help that they need.

Today's labour market is buoyant. In November alone, in just one month, nearly 250,000 new vacancies were notified to jobcentres—the highest figure in any single month since records began. More than 7 million jobs become vacant every year. A quarter of people who become unemployed leave unemployment within a month, half within three months and about two thirds within six months. The Employment Service placed a record 2 million people into jobs in the past year. As jobs are more available, it makes sense to tilt the balance of our programmes increasingly towards helping people with job search.

The number of opportunities for unemployed people will remain the same—1.5 million—even though there are fewer people out of work. Community action is to end because help needs to be focused more precisely and its place is to be taken by around 240,000 places, double the current number, on 1-2-1 to provide intensive help and counselling to unemployed people. There will be more help with job search. Under the jobseeker's allowance, every unemployed person will have a jobseeker's agreement that will set out the steps needed to help get them back to work.

Mr. Rowlands: I have been following the right hon. Lady's speech closely. Will she confirm that the document from which my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) quoted was not drafted by a Department, but offered the considered view of officials and Ministers about the community action programme?

Mrs. Shephard: I make it a practice never to comment on stolen documents, which I have said before in the House.

The hon. Member for Brightside rightly mentioned that people with special needs require special help. I shall outline that help in a moment. The Employment Service will spend more time with jobseekers, reviewing their progress and giving help and advice.

In April 1996, we shall introduce new project work pilots for 6,000 people in two areas. In the pilot areas, people who have been unemployed for more than two years will be given 13 weeks of the most appropriate help that the Employment Service can offer, which will be followed by 13 weeks of work experience for those who remain unemployed. The aim is to concentrate work experience on those who most need it.

Around 21,800 severely disabled people will be helped in supported employment in 1995-96, at a cost of around £153 million.

Mr. Ian McCartney: Will the pilots operate in travel-to-work areas or in constituencies?

Mrs. Shephard: That has been announced; the two areas are Medway and Hull. I should be happy to give the hon. Gentleman the details if he wishes, but I believe that his colleagues have the information already.

Placing, assessment and counselling teams, PACTS, will provide an integrated, flexible and local specialist service for more severely disabled people, and will include access to supported employment. PACTS will give advice and practical help to employers to assist, recruit, train and retain disabled people.

Training and re-skilling are also a key part of the strategy for improved economic performance—I think that we are all agreed on that at least. To compete successfully in world markets, clearly the United Kingdom and its companies must have a highly skilled, flexible and adaptable work force. We are committed to creating the conditions that will help to achieve that goal, which lies at the heart of the agenda for the new merged Department for Education and Employment. The merger has been welcomed by almost everyone, including some of the stakeholders—though not by the Labour party—so that we can bring together the workplace and the classroom to make what is done in schools, colleges and universities relevant to the workplace.

We have national targets for education and training, which I certainly accept are ambitious and challenging. They are aimed at fitting Britain's economy and people for the 21st century. The two competitiveness White Papers lay out the strategy for achieving those targets, and we have backed it with £300 million.

Britain, uniquely, has a national network of training and enterprise councils, which are committed to achieving the targets. The TECs are creating better local training provision, helping local people and helping to regenerate local economies.

National vocational qualifications are increasingly being used, and more than 80 per cent. of the working population is covered by them. I had the pleasure of awarding the millionth just before Christmas. More young people are learning about the world of work through work experience, and we are supporting arrangements to make it available to pupils in their last year of compulsory schooling.

People are increasingly taking up or continuing education and training, and 84 per cent. of the work force has a qualification. TEC expenditure, contrary to the remarks made by the hon. Member for Brightside, is set to rise, up 5 per cent., to £1.4 billion, above the expected expenditure in this financial year. The budget for youth programmes will rise by more than £100 million against forecast expenditure next year.

Modern apprenticeships are a serious and major reform of our training system. More than 50 sectors now have training frameworks, and recruitment has started in all English TEC areas. The training for work budget is being scaled down precisely because there has been the fall in unemployment that I have described, but the provision for people with special needs will be retained at existing levels.

Training for work remains a major programme, and quality will be improved to increase the emphasis on improved job outcomes.

Mr. Blunkett: Can the right hon. Lady tell me why the budget of the access to work project has been frozen? Why are the Government proposing to reduce drastically availability of that key bridge between training and equipping for work and the opportunity for disabled people to get work?

Mrs. Shephard: The budget of the access to work programme has already been exceeded during this year by some £6 million, so we are having to put a ceiling on expenditure this year. Meanwhile, we are consulting on the way forward for next year.

Unemployed people are not a single lump; they are individuals—people of all ages, all backgrounds and with very different hopes and aspirations. No single programme is right for them all—some need re-skilling; some need work experience; and others need help with job search. Individuals differ, and their needs differ, which is why we have a mix of programmes and the flexibility to adapt them to suit individual needs.

We shall continue to pay particular attention to those with special needs. The Government are committed to maintain the current volume of trainees with special needs, which includes those with disabilities, on the training for work programme, despite a reduction in the size of that programme. Disabled people will remain eligible for that programme without having to satisfy the six-month unemployment criterion.

We believe in giving opportunities and rights to individual people, to real people of flesh and blood—not stakeholders. We want a society in which people are in charge of their own destinies; a society where people have rights, opportunities and choices.

Since 1979, we have given the people a real stake in society. We have handed the trade unions to their members; we have given parents the right to choose schools for their children and given people ownership of industry in a share-owning democracy. That is a society of opportunity and choice, with real participation in the choices that all of us face in everyday life.

The people welcome those opportunities, and will not accept a return to the bad old days when the stakeholders ran Britain, and ran it into the ground. They will not accept more regulation or more taxation. They will not accept more bureaucrats telling them how to run their businesses and how to run their lives.

On Sunday, the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) let the cat out of the bag—a Labour Government, he said,

"cannot govern without the support of the unions".

I agree. No Labour Government have ever governed without the support of the trade unions because no Labour Government can afford to ignore their paymasters. Unlike the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), the hon. Member for Brent, East at least had the honesty to admit that, and to admit it publicly.

But I have news for Opposition Members: now that the truth is out, the people can make a real decision about what is on offer. In the 1970s—the days of the stakeholder society—Government, big business and the trade union barons took decisions on people's behalf. Of course, we are told that under new Labour there will be no return to beer and sandwiches in smoke-filled rooms. Of course not, because under new Labour it would be deals over smoked salmon and dry white wine in a smoke-free zone. It is a case of new packaging and old ideas.

People will not accept a Britain where public services are provided on a take-it-or-leave-it basis, with only the rich able to choose for themselves which school is right for their child. People want a society in which they as individuals have a stake. For most people, the biggest stake they have in society is their job. Jobs give people not just income, but self-confidence and self-respect. That is why the priority must be to create more jobs. That is why policies that destroy jobs—the social chapter and the national minimum wage—the policies to which the Opposition are signed up, are such a cruel fraud.

That is why the Government will continue to give priority to creating an economy that continues to deliver the jobs that people want.

8.8 pm

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): Earlier, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) referred to the phrase "line to take" that appeared in a document. I have a feeling that the Secretary of State has made a speech using the line to take on stakeholders issued by Conservative central office. I think that what we have heard will become a familiar refrain. I do not know in which society or world the right hon. Lady is living, but she has not described the world or community that I represent.

I shall tell the right hon. Lady a fact of life over the past 15 years: the Government believe that the frontiers of the state should be pushed back, but the state has never been more intrusive in people's lives. More people than ever before in post-war Britain are dependent on the state

[Mr. Ted Rowlands]

because of the cumulative effect of Government policy. The state intrudes into people's lives because they have had to become more dependent on it because of rising unemployment and growing dependency on benefits. The Secretary of State may talk about an enterprising society and choice, but as a result of Government policy an increasing number of my constituents have been forced into a new dependency culture that they do not like and did not want.

I should have hoped that, if nothing else, there could be a basic consensus on the subject of training. I think that hon. Members on both sides of the House agree that training and skills will be vital to competitiveness. In a world of global trade and transfer of production, one factor that national Governments can still influence, alter and support is skills training. As that issue is crucial, we should analyse what the Government have or have not done about it.

I have been a strong supporter for a considerable time of training programmes in my constituency produced by Ministers and a succession of Secretaries of State for Wales. I promoted and supported modern manufacturing schemes introduced by successive Secretaries of State including the right hon. Lady's immediate predecessor, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). The right hon. Gentleman came and supported the sort of schemes that we have been backing in Merthyr.

Over the past 15 or 20 years, there has been a bewildering series of changes in the programmes, which have been set up and then closed. We do not believe in the pick-and-mix approach described by the Secretary of State. The changes have often been driven by Budget changes from one year to the next. Some years a lot of money has been thrown at training programmes, and in other years programmes have been cut, almost overnight. Those changes have created in many people, particularly young people, resentment towards training—they feel alienated. Many people, particularly young people, now take a cynical approach towards the schemes and no longer believe in training. That development, which has been caused partly by the chops and changes made to training programmes over the years, is worrying and must be overcome.

One in five school leavers in Mid Glamorgan cannot be accounted for: they are not involved in training or further education; they do not collect the dole and they do not claim benefit. They have simply disappeared from the system. One in five school leavers in Mid Glamorgan no longer have any connection with the system: they are not scrounging or claiming benefits and they are not following training programmes. I suspect that that large and worrying core of school leavers will provide the basis for future problems and concerns in our society.

That worrying core of school leavers has been created partly because they no longer believe that community and Government training programmes will meet their needs, and who can blame them? Surely the Secretary of State knows that community action provided one of the bridges between welfare and work. I should have thought that there would be a consensus on the need to build bridges and make the connection between welfare and work. But the community action programme, which was one of those bridges, was blown up overnight. Despite the references in the leaked document to the quality, usefulness and popularity of some of the community action programmes, that bridge will now be blown up.

The community action programme is to be blown up without any assessment of the consequences. I asked the Secretary of State for Wales—the Welsh Office has responsibility for training in Wales—to tell me about the community action programmes. I received a written answer to my question stating that he did not know. The Welsh Office does not know about the programmes that it has suddenly decided to close—it does not have a list or any idea of the programmes' character. In a written answer the Welsh Office said that the information was not available centrally. Presumably, the Secretary of State sat at the Cabinet table and nodded through the closure of the community action programmes without any knowledge or detailed understanding of them.

Many of the people who have been involved in the community action programmes over the years have felt that they were not always good, did not offer much training and were, in some cases, half-baked, but they felt that the programmes provided a necessary link to work. The people involved in the community action programme are those least likely to obtain employment. The Government used falling unemployment as their basic excuse for closing the programme.

I am worried that those involved in the programme will not obtain employment. They are people with special needs and less ability and aptitude than others; such people require the community action programme as they will not automatically gain maximum benefit from the improvement in local employment prospects. They are the victims and are less likely than others to obtain jobs. The right hon. Lady and the Government have closed one of the programmes that provided a bridge between welfare and work.

Has the Secretary of State followed what has happened to the training for work changes that have been implemented and the introduction of the outcome-related schemes? Have the right hon. Lady or Ministers tried to find out what is happening in relation to training for work? It has increasingly turned out to be nothing more than an employment subsidy. I am not necessarily against employment subsidies, but it seems strange for the Government to propose them. Training programmes have shrunk and almost disappeared, and most training providers are paid to move people into employment as quickly as possible, irrespective of the quality or character of the job and irrespective of the potential employee's training or vocation.

I do not know whether my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) will quote from the Coopers and Lybrand report on the programmes, which spelt out the point that I just made. On the Government's changes to the training for work programme, the report states:

"training providers cannot actually create job opportunities but they can create training opportunities which are likely to improve a trainee's future employment potential."

That is the one goal that the training for work programme is not achieving—it is not training a trainee so that he or she has the potential for employment. In most cases, it moves people into work as quickly as possible, irrespective of their skills or training. The programme might sound like a good idea—no one is against it—but it is not a training programme. It is an employment

subsidy. There may be a case for employment subsidies, but the programme is not a training scheme.

How can we square that approach with the desire to lift skills and achieve targets for NVQ3 and NVQ4? The Secretary of State might not know about it and there is no Welsh Office Minister present, but only this week a new report on the 1994 Welsh training and education survey was published. It sets up targets for NVQ3 and NVQ4 to be achieved by the year 2000. The aim is that 60 per cent. of people in Wales should achieve NVQ3 by the end of the century. The figures show that at present only 39 per cent. are achieving that goal. How does the right hon. Lady think that the targets will be achieved when the training for work programme and many other skills and training programmes are diminishing?

In the county of Mid Glamorgan, a part of which I represent, only 42 per cent. of men and 29 per cent. of women have the equivalent of NVQ3 qualifications. We are supposed to reach 60 per cent. by the year 2000. How will that target be achieved in four years? What method and approach will achieve such levels of skills in four years, enabling us to make a leap of the magnitude that the targets require?

We are supposed to achieve a target of 30 per cent. at NVQ4 by the year 2000. At the moment, Mid Glamorgan achieves only 18 per cent. How is that skills gap to be crossed? How will the leap to those standards be achieved?

My worry is that that lot, the Conservative Government, are like Soviet commissar planners. They announce targets and believe that somehow they will be achieved. If one announced Soviet production, it was reality. Similarly, it appears that if one announces training targets for the year 2000, they will happen irrespective of anything else.

I must tell the Secretary of State and her Ministers that the skills and training element of many training, training for work and other programmes is shrinking. I understand that the only target is to get people into jobs irrespective of how dead-end those jobs are and irrespective of what qualifications those people obtain in the process, what needs are met and what training is associated with that.

How will those targets be reached by the year 2000? They are firm, strong, powerful commitments made by the Government. I do not believe that in many cases the programmes that they offer and deliver in the communities that I represent will achieve that type of target. We have a common aim, a common purpose, a consensus in those terms, but I do not believe that the methods that have been adopted, especially the fundamental changes that have occurred in training for work programmes, are likely to achieve such targets.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brightside spoke about the skills audit. We have one as a result of the Welsh training and education survey. The other thing that the survey shows is that, whereas NVQ3s and similar levels of training are achieved by 50 per cent. of employees in the public sector, only 30 per cent. of employees in the private sector achieve them. The old-fashioned public sector has somehow maintained, and tried to pay for and support, training standards.

For all the Secretary of State's passionate support for enterprise and the private sector, which we all support, according to the survey only 30 per cent. of private sector employees are achieving NVQ3s, as opposed to 50 per cent. in the public sector. A gender gap has opened up and now a gap has opened up in relation to whether one works in the public or the private sector.

I am not being condemnatory. I am not being censorious about private companies and private enterprise. However, the right hon. Lady should know that, in the past 15 to 20 years, in the private sector, people have regarded training as a cost that must be cut, not an investment that must be made. That is the fundamental, simple, basic thing that has occurred.

The Secretary of State may not like to hear talk about stakeholders, and so on, but somehow those attitudes must change, not among employees but among those who employ. Why is it that figures of the type revealed in the survey demonstrate the low skills in much of the private sector in Welsh economic, industrial and employment life?

I do not know which companies Conservative Members represent, but in the 1980s, with the requirement for labour flexibility, under the pressure to achieve the lower costs that were essential for economic growth, which the Secretary of State mentioned, the first thing that went was training. Training was abandoned furthest and fastest by many employers. I understand the reasons, given the struggles and the background against which they worked. They cut training almost as though it were a cost, and did not regard it as an investment.

Somehow, a combination of Government and companies must restore the fundamental principle that training is an investment, not a cost. Whether one likes it or not, companies in Taiwan, Korea, Japan and Germany—western European companies and Asian companies—believe that training is an investment, not a cost. Until, between Government and companies, we turn the United Kingdom attitude around and decide that training is an investment, not a cost, we shall not achieve the targets and the levels of training and skills that I hope that we have a common cause to achieve. I must tell the Secretary of State that, given the figures, those surveys that have been produced—at least in Welsh terms, in the communities that I represent—demonstrate that we must do something more and different from that which has been offered to us by the Secretary of State's speech.

We have transferred the burden of costs from companies to the state. It is curious that the cost of state financing of training has continually increased. Responsibilities and costs that were borne by companies in the early days have been transferred through unemployment, and through state and training and enterprise council training schemes, and so on, to the state.

It is time to give companies a major incentive and place on them a simple responsible duty to train. That is the first and fundamental change that we want, so that the Government, companies and individuals have one simple belief—that training is an investment in the present and the future, not a cost that may be cut and altered under the impact of change.

Sadly, the most recent Budget demonstrated that not just companies believe that training is a cost that must be cut and a burden; so do the Government.

8.26 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): It is right that I should begin by asking why it is that, if the subject of the debate

[Mr. Peter Luff]

is so important to the Labour party that it gives up a precious half of one its Supply days to debate it, so few Labour Back Benchers seek to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Five.

Mr. Luff: Two Labour Back-Bench Members.

Perhaps it is because Labour Members know that the economic position in their constituencies is so good now that their heart is not in it. The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) has witnessed a 19 per cent. reduction in unemployment in his constituency since the most recent general election. The other Opposition Member who I believe is trying to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe), has witnessed a reduction of 21 per cent. in his constituency.

The Labour Front-Bench spokesman who opened the debate, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), has witnessed a reduction of 20 per cent. in unemployment in his constituency. I am also happy to tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), who will close the debate, has witnessed a reduction of 30 per cent. in his constituency. I am afraid that the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), who represents the Liberal Democrats, has witnessed a reduction of only 17 per cent., which probably says something about the wisdom of the Liberal Democrat vote. In East Antrim, I believe that the reduction in unemployment since the general election has been 27 per cent. I am glad to say that in Worcester, there has been a larger reduction than in any of those constituencies—about 32 per cent.—since the general election.

Mr. Beggs: The hon. Gentleman should recalculate his figures. One hundred and twenty of my constituents were made unemployed last week.

Mr. Luff: I am very sorry to hear that; none the less, there has been a substantial reduction in unemployment since the general election. Perhaps that is why few Opposition Members are showing their faces in the Chamber tonight.

None of us disputes the fact that training is important. It is important at two levels—for the individual and for the country. We live in a world of rapid change. I know that evidence is a little unclear on how much faster that rate of change is occurring in jobs. I am currently on my sixth job—I hope my last. I shall be only 41 next month. There is no training for the job of a Member of Parliament except rather inadequate on the job training.

I believe that the rate of change in employment is increasing for individuals. Major career changes during one's life are much more likely. If one is to remain economically active during one's life, retraining is increasingly important. If an individual is to contribute to the society of which he or she is a part, retraining is increasingly important. I strongly agreed with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State when she said that the most important stake that an individual had in society was his or her job.

I believe that there is a moral dimension to this subject—a "one nation" dimension. I very much resent the Labour party's attempts to appropriate that phrase, given what it did to create two, three or who knows how many nations during the winter of discontent.

Training is also important for the competitiveness of the nation as a whole. We all suffer if competitiveness declines. If talent is wasted, output is forgone and if output is forgone, wealth will be reduced in the public and private sectors—whether it is private consumption or public investment in hospitals and schools.

It is no wonder that training has become Labour's mantra: a substitute for any alternative economic policy. The Labour party has adopted a motherhood and apple pie approach which cannot be opposed but which, when examined carefully, is completely vacuous. Who invented training in the modern British economy? I believe that it was the Conservative party. I believe also that Labour's attitude to training is hypocritical on at least three counts: Labour's record while in office, its failure to acknowledge what we have achieved during our period in office, and its plans to increase unemployment.

Let us examine those points in turn. The first hypocrisy is Labour's record. I know that 1979 is a long time ago, but since then expenditure under this Government has increased two and a half times in real terms. There has been a huge increase in expenditure on training. Labour Members lecture us about modest cuts—which, as my right hon. Friend said, are a response to falling unemployment—but Labour's expenditure on training was scandalously low. That was one product of Labour's economic failure and incompetence.

The second hypocrisy is Labour's failure to acknowledge that we have done any good. Labour Members highlight only the problems that they allege exist. I wonder whether shadow Cabinet meetings to discuss the training budget are rather like the marvellous scene from "Monty Python's Life of Brian". Hon. Members will remember that scene when the conspirators are plotting to overthrow Roman rule. One of them asks, "What have the Romans ever done for us?" and another replies, "Well, there are the aqueducts." The first conspirator then says, "Yes, but apart from the aqueducts, what have the Romans ever done for us?" Someone else then says, "Well, there are the roads," and the reply is, "Yes, but apart from the roads and the aqueducts, what have the Romans ever done for us?" Law is then mentioned, along with the roads and the aqueducts—I am sure that hon. Members know how the litany continues.

Perhaps Labour Members sit around the shadow Cabinet table and say, "What have the Conservatives ever done for training?" Some brave soul may say, "Well, they have increased expenditure sharply," and the reply may be, "Yes, they have increased expenditure." Someone else may say, "Well, they have created 1.5 million training places," and the reply may be, "Yes, they have created 1.5 million training places and increased expenditure sharply." Someone may then suggest, "Well, they have set up the training and enterprise councils; they are quite successful." The reply may be, "Yes, they have set up the TECs, they have created 1.5 million training places and they have increased expenditure sharply. Okay, apart from that, what have the Conservatives ever done for training?" Someone else may then say, "Well, they have introduced national vocational qualifications."

So the Conservatives have introduced NVQs, they have set up the TECs, they have created 1.5 million training places and sharply increased expenditure. Apart from that, we have also increased participation rates in higher and further education and training. So we have increased

participation rates and established NVQs, and TECs, produced 1.5 million training places and increased expenditure—Labour Members may well ask what the Conservatives have done for training.

Of course, there is a third element to Labour's hypocrisy. The Government are now able to look more critically at the training budget because we have reduced unemployment sharply. However, the Opposition's policies would increase unemployment. There are more people in work as a proportion of the population of working age than in any other major European Union country. Some 68 per cent. of those of working age are in employment compared with 66 per cent. in Germany, 60 per cent. in France and 53 per cent. in Italy. Only 8.2 per cent. of our population are unemployed, compared with 8.4 per cent. in Germany, 11.4 per cent. in France and 11.3 per cent. in Italy. Youth unemployment in this country is 17.2 per cent. Although I agree that that is too high, it compares favourably with the European average of 20.6 per cent., the French figure of 26.5 per cent. and the Spanish figure of 40.3 per cent.

Mr. Rowlands: As the hon. Gentleman is making comparisons with 1979, will he tell us the unemployment figures in 1979 and compare them with today's figures?

Mr. Luff: The hon. Gentleman knows full well that this Government's record is a damn sight better than that of any other major European Union country. That is the point: we have done extremely well compared with our competitors.

The Opposition plan to increase unemployment. I shall not labour the point, but we all know what the effects of the social chapter and the minimum wage will be. If Labour Members wished to use training to cope with the unemployment that they would create, they would have to spend massive amounts of money simply to maintain the level of training for the unemployed that we have achieved.

The trouble with the Labour party is that it cannot tell good expenditure from bad. Labour Members believe that making £1 of taxpayers' money work harder is always worse than the simpler option of taking another 10p from the taxpayer. They do not understand that we must look critically at every expenditure programme, including training, and ask whether it is delivering value for money to the taxpayer.

If unemployment is falling as a result of the Government's successful economic policies, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State must take a decision: should she cut expenditure proportionately in order to protect the taxpayer fully, should she maintain expenditure and increase the per capita sum, the total real value of the budget, or should she strike some kind of compromise between the two? I generally favour the latter course, and that seems to be what the Government have done. They have compromised between protecting the taxpayer's interests and increasing the real, effective training budget.

Unemployment has been falling sharply for 27 months. The number of long-term unemployed has decreased by 12 per cent. in the past year and it is 28 per cent. lower than when the community action programme was established. Youth unemployment has decreased by 24 per cent. in three years. That is why I have no hesitation in suggesting that the motion is rank hypocrisy. It highlights only one scheme that has been abolished and the Opposition forget entirely the new initiatives that we are taking to adjust our training programme to changing circumstances.

I refer to the 1-2-1 scheme, the new project work pilots, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State highlighted in her speech, and other very important changes which I believe will assist the unemployed, including the jobseeker's allowance. Then there are the reforms to the social security system, family credit, national insurance, housing benefit, the back-to-work bonus and child care changes. They will help to reduce unemployment still further.

I shall conclude on a local note. The community action programme has proved valuable in my constituency; it has done a good job. However, I am prepared to support its abolition, for the reasons that I set out earlier in my speech and because of the dramatic improvement locally in the situation facing the long-term jobless. Since October 1993, total unemployment has fallen from 13,735 to 10,909 in the area covered by my training and enterprise council. It is encouraging to note that the percentage of long-term unemployed in those figures has fallen also, from 37 per cent. in October 1993 to 29.6 per cent. in October 1995. It is a smaller proportion of a smaller figure. That is why I can accept the abolition of the community action programme.

The debate gives me an opportunity to praise the work of my local training and enterprise council, Hereford and Worcester training and enterprise council. It is one of the best-performing TECs in the country and it is run excellently by Alan Curless, the chief executive. Its performance with regard to youth training has improved significantly—especially among young people with special needs at NVQ1. However, I am pleased to say that there have been similar improvements at levels 3 and 4. Hawtec expects the modern apprenticeship scheme to improve the results even further. I highlight to Labour Members the fact that the cost of delivering that success is decreasing. I add one caveat: I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will listen to the concerns of some TECs about the cash flow effect of the method of financing modern apprenticeships. I do not know whether those concerns are well founded, but this is a considerable worry to my local training and enterprise council.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): I am not suggesting that Conservative Back Benchers or those on the Government Front Bench are creating unemployment deliberately; I accept that it is a sin of omission rather than commission which is due simply to their incompetence. However, does the hon. Gentleman accept that all the devices and the programmes and schemes that the Government have introduced to mitigate unemployment have absolutely no effect in constituencies such as mine, where youth unemployment is more like 70 or 80 per cent. than 17 or 18 per cent.?

Mr. Luff: The simple answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is no. I am sorry that I gave way to him. I did not realise that he was not in the Chamber to listen to the earlier part of the debate and I did not know from which direction the voice on the other side was coming.

I am pleased to say that the emphasis on training for work has altered locally to provide more focus on the long-term unemployed, particularly those aged between

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18 and 24 years who have been unemployed for more than two years. Contrary to the pessimism expressed by the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney, job outcomes locally have improved significantly as a result of training for work. We expect something like 45 per cent. of programme leavers to find work in the Hawtec area in 1995-96. It is perfectly possible for the TEC in my area to manage the reduction in the training for work budget that is already on the table, but I hope that there will be no significant reductions beyond that.

My TEC is an excellent one and it gives me great confidence in the Government's management of training issues. I am delighted that it is merging with the local chamber of commerce. The Three Counties chamber of commerce also has an honourable and fine record in providing training programmes. I understand that an extraordinary general meeting is to be held on 7 February with a view to getting a new board in place by 25 March. It will be a merged chamber. I am sure that merged TECs and chambers will do a great deal for unemployment throughout the country and that they have a great deal to offer.

I urge the House to reject the foolish motion that is before it.

8.39 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): During the speech of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), I was depressed by many of the interventions of Conservative Members, which suggested that many of them do not believe in the importance of qualifications for members of our work force.

In one respect, I was delighted by the speech of the Secretary of State, just as, in one respect, I was delighted by the speech of the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff). Both of them stated clearly that they believe, along with Opposition Members, that training is crucial. The right hon. Lady drew attention to national targets for education and training. She rightly said that they are ambitious and challenging targets, but pledged herself to doing what she could to help the nation achieve them. There is unanimity among some of us in recognising that improving the skills and qualifications of our people is crucial. As the hon. Member for Worcester said, that is vital for the future competitiveness of the United Kingdom.

Unfortunately, Conservative Members started to giggle when reference was made to various league tables. In some instances the Government like league tables, but when the United Kingdom is not doing well in them, they do not favour them so much. The Secretary of State, like the hon. Member for Brightside and me, recently attended the North of England education conference, which was addressed by Sir Geoffrey Holland. Sir Geoffrey drew attention to league tables that have not been mentioned so far this evening. For example, he observed that 64 per cent. of our work force has no vocational qualifications, whereas in Germany the figure is 26 per cent. In Switzerland, it is only 23 per cent.

Sir Geoffrey referred to other league tables that set out the proportion of the work force that holds intermediate-level qualifications. In France, it is 40 per cent.; in Germany, 63 per cent.; in the Netherlands, 57 per cent.; and in Switzerland, 66 per cent. In the United Kingdom, it is only 25 per cent. That is real cause for concern.

I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber recognise that skilled employees lead to increased productivity. That in turn shows through in increased competitiveness. In improving skills, we shall be creating jobs, reducing the level of unemployment, increasing the country's economic prosperity and increasing the well-being of all our citizens.

The evidence of a connection between skills and competitiveness is well established. Sir Geoffrey Holland gave the example of employees engaged in woodworking in Germany. On the shop floor, 90 per cent. of those people have a craft-related qualification. In Britain, only 10 per cent. are so qualified. Output per employee in Germany is about two and a half times higher than that in Britain. There is the connection. The sadness is that we are significantly falling behind our European competitors in ensuring that members of work forces have job-related qualifications.

Another sadness is that it is not a new problem. Indeed, 101 years ago, a report was produced by the Royal Commission on secondary education. I shall quote one of its passages. I apologise for the language, which is not entirely politically correct. The passage reads:

> "The educational opportunities offered to boys and girls who do not proceed to the universities, but leave school at 16, are still far behind the requirements of our time. The disadvantages from which young Englishmen suffer in industry and commerce owing to the superior preparation of their competitors in several countries of Continental Europe are real."

Sadly, that is still true.

The United Kingdom is failing to deal effectively with a skills deficit when we compare ourselves with our competitors. At the same time, we know that the number of low-skill manual jobs is sharply to decline. We shall not succeed as a low-wage, low-skill economy. It is sad that, in this European Year of Lifelong Learning, we are debating the way in which the Government have made cuts in employment and training programmes that are crucial to increase the skills of our work force and to ensure that we meet the targets that the Secretary of State rightly says are vital.

It is ludicrous that about £25 billion a year is being wasted in benefits paid and taxes forgone because of the high level of unemployment. About £9 billion is still attributable to long-term unemployment. Something desperately needs to be done. We must not make cuts in the mechanisms that could reverse the situation.

The hon. Member for Worcester was right to say that, over a number of months, there has been a considerable fall in unemployment levels, including long-term unemployment. Although I understand that the Deputy Prime Minister is able to comment on tomorrow's figures, I had better not do so. The reduction in unemployment levels is clearly welcome, but the number of long-term unemployed as a percentage of all those unemployed is still rising. There are still about 800,000 who have been out of work for more than 12 months. About 1.3 million have been out of work for more than six months. Short-term unemployment is the source of long-term joblessness. It is important that we provide the short-term, as well as the long-term, unemployed with opportunities to gain the skills that will be crucial if we are to create the competitive climate and economy that we need to see.

My party has made it clear that it believes that training and education are critical. Increased investment in training and education is also critical if the United Kingdom is to succeed in an increasingly global market. We need to unlock the potential of all our people, including the nearly 2.25 million who are unemployed.

It is sad that the Government's response to the challenge, as the motion and the debate have highlighted, has been to close the community action programme and to reduce expenditure on employment and training programmes by 4 per cent. We are seeing also a cut of about £200 million in the support offered to the training and enterprise councils.

Those Government decisions show a number of key points, first, that the Government are simply interested in short-term measures for tackling long-term unemployment. As the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) pointed out earlier, there have been constant changes in the programmes—short-term measures brought on stream and then scrapped and another gimmick introduced to give the pretence that the Government are taking real action. Secondly, they show that, after 17 years in office, the Government have found it impossible to design and implement a high-quality, high-investment skills programme for the unemployed that can contribute to the achievement of the national targets for education and training.

Reference has been made to the cuts in the training for work programme—a cut of 16 per cent. of planned expenditure. That shows that the Government expect training and enterprise councils to do more and more with less and less. The hon. Member for Worcester said that the cut in the training for work programme was in response to a reduction in the number of the long-term unemployed; but that is not the only thing that is happening. As the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney pointed out, the funding mechanism for training for work is altering to the output-related funding method, with the various problems that that will introduce, and that he so adequately described. There will also be a change in the basis of the planned cost per start under training for work, which is to reduce from £2,549 in 1995-96 to £2,477 in 1996-97. That, of course, is in cash terms. The real terms cut is greater than that implies

We all know that there have been problems with training for work. We recognise that only some 30 per cent. of participants have achieved a national vocational qualification, and that slightly more have gained a work placement subsequently. Improvements need to be made to the programme. One cannot bring about improvements if one is reducing not only the funding for the programme overall but the amount of money that will be available per person on the programme itself. That suggests that we will not, through the programme, be able to add the contribution that is necessary to achieve the targets. It is worth reflecting on what the director of strategy and policy at the TEC National Council said:

> "The News about TfW is not good . . . It will be particularly difficult to support higher level skills training."

The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney made the point eloquently. Training for work, underfunded as it will now be, will gradually move away from being a training programme that helps people acquire the skills and qualifications to one that gives people somewhere to go and spend their time, supported by the Government.

Another thing that is worrying is the way in which the Government have cut, prematurely, the community action programme. The hon. Member for Brightside referred to that. That is a particular blow to the long-term unemployed and to the voluntary sector, which has been involved in administering many of the schemes. Those schemes have been able to help some of our most disadvantaged citizens. Many of the voluntary organisations that have supplied places, particularly for disadvantaged adults, through the community action programme, may well, I fear, withdraw from involvement in any subsequent training programme activities. That would be a significant loss to our training endeavour. Many of the long-term unemployed, many of whom have benefited from community action, will now be largely excluded from training and enterprise council training programmes.

The Government have argued that the community action programme is no longer needed, but, if that is true, they must explain how they will support the 40,500 people benefiting under that scheme. We shall no doubt hear from the Minister, as we heard from the Secretary of State earlier, that a number of new projects have been put in place, but together they do not provide the support for that number of people.

Too much of Britain's talent has been wasted and too many opportunities have been lost. The Government's decisions on training and employment programmes mean that that situation will continue. We should be boosting training for work. We must stop the constant stop-go policy of a new gimmick here and a new gimmick there. We need some security that, once introduced, training programmes will be given an opportunity to develop and improve, so that we can get better outputs from those programmes. We must also look at a number of other issues that have not been touched on tonight.

One of the things that the Government have done—I give them credit for this—and also the TECs, which have been promoting it, is to introduce the investors in people programme. That was a welcome initiative. When it was introduced, I was sceptical about whether it would work and whether companies would be interested in it. I was proved wrong. Companies are increasingly aware of the value of training their existing work force. Investors in people has provided the boost for many of them to do that.

As other hon. Members have said, we need to encourage more people to train. One of the ways in which we could do that would be to consider introducing a 2 per cent. remissible training tax. If a company did not spend up to 2 per cent. of its payroll, it would be taxed on the difference. If it were spending up to 2 per cent. of its payroll on training, it would avoid the tax. That would provide the stick to go alongside the carrot that is provided by investors in people, and ensure that companies that have not yet recognised the benefit of providing increased training for their existing employees might well do so. We need to find other imaginative ways of providing support to the long-term as well as the short-term unemployed. We would not, however, cut back on the programmes that already exist.

It is clear that there is a degree of unanimity in the Chamber about the importance of training and about increasing the skill levels of our work force and providing support to the unemployed. By making cuts in the training programme, the Government will undermine the possibility of increasing the support that we offer, and

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will undermine the ability of the unemployed to gain the high-skill jobs that they need for their own benefit and which the country needs them to have for the economic prosperity of the nation.

8.57 pm

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): I welcome the opportunity to say a few words in this important debate instigated by the Opposition, but I am a little surprised that only three of their Back-Bench Members are present for it.

Mr. Meacher: Only three Conservative Members are present.

Mrs. Peacock: It is the Opposition's debate.

I have always supported training and education from whomever and wherever it came. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, there were the job opportunities and community programmes. They were mostly then, as perhaps now, organised by the voluntary sector, usually councils for voluntary service. What a difference that made to setting young people, in particular, on the path to a job. Many more opportunities are now available to help people back into work.

I was intrigued by the Leader of the Opposition's reference to stakeholders. I wonder whether he travelled through Romania on his way back from Singapore, visiting Dracula's castle at Bran. I believe that he is the stakeholder whom most people know best. I am not sure that it has much relevance to our modern-day society.

Special help is available for the unemployed, in particular for those unemployed for longer than six months. There are job clubs, training for work, job interview guarantee schemes and work trials. They are all designed to help unemployed people with different needs. It is well recognised that there cannot be a universal programme for everyone seeking work.

Work trials enable unemployed people to try out a job for up to three weeks, giving them the opportunity to show employers what they can do and giving employers the opportunity to see whether people's skills are appropriate for the job that they are offering. That will ensure that many more round pegs go into round holes, rather than the mismatching that we have had in the past.

Restart courses help those who have been unemployed for two years. The jobfinder's grant covers additional expenses. That is most important because many unemployed people need such help, particularly after a long period of unemployment. There is also help for the short-term unemployed. We have already heard how important it is to help the short-term unemployed, to prevent them becoming the long-term unemployed. Job search seminars give practical advice to people unemployed for more than 13 weeks. The travel-to-interview scheme pays the cost of travel to interviews away from an applicant's immediate home area.

We have already heard of the many investors in people schemes. That must be good. Many of my manufacturers realise the importance of their work force and the training that they give them and they wish to retain that trained skilled work force. They put huge amounts of time, effort and money into those schemes.

We also have training and enterprise councils, although I am sometimes a little concerned about them. They have rather palatial offices with many jobs and I am not entirely convinced that they are creating as many jobs outside as I would wish them to do. My hon. Friend the Minister might like to say a word or two on that. Any unemployment is unacceptable and I am delighted to see the reductions in the number of people unemployed since 1992. We now have 733,000 fewer people unemployed since that date.

When I became a Member of Parliament in 1983, there were 1,900 long-term unemployed in my constituency. That figure has now been halved. It is still too many, but it is always moving as some people become unemployed and others return to work, and it is moving in the right direction. Unemployment in my constituency now stands at 6.7 per cent., much less than in 1983.

Unemployment has fallen in the past 27 consecutive months, and we must all welcome that. It is also interesting to note that youth unemployment in July 1995 was 24 per cent. lower than that in January 1993. European Commission figures show that the United Kingdom has more people in employment and fewer people out of work than any other major European country. It is right that that should be well documented.

The community action programme was established in 1993 when the number of long-term unemployed was 28 per cent. higher than it is now. I understood that it was introduced for one year only and then extended. As I have already said, the public sector provides a considerable number and range of opportunities to help young and unemployed people.

Our own industries also provide training for their work forces. The Confederation of British Wool Textiles has a first-class successful training scheme, not just for young people but for people of all ages within its work force. That has produced many more NVQ and other qualifications in recent years. That is most welcome.

As the House will be aware, from April 1996, incentives for employers to take on someone who has been out of work for two years or more will be extended. Employers will be able to claim a full rebate of such people's national insurance contributions for up to 12 months. That will help many people back into work. It is suggested that the figure could be as much as 120,000—I would certainly welcome that.

Another measure that I have long wanted to see is that, from April 1996, full housing benefit will be extended for four weeks to people going back to work. All hon. Members have had cases where someone has been out of work, has had help with housing benefit, has got a job on Monday the first and has not been paid until Monday the 31st. How do such people manage during that period? We have a responsibility to help them take that job, but not be penalised by having one month's arrears of rent or mortgage at the end of that period. I welcome that measure whole-heartedly.

It is interesting that we are told that there are not very many jobs, yet the *Yorkshire Evening Post*, Yorkshire's daily newspaper, regularly has a billboard saying, "500 jobs today" or "600 jobs advertised today", so some jobs are available. I know someone who recently came back from Australia, having been there for 20 years, with no income—practically nothing. Within a week, however,

he had found himself a job, which was interesting. He did not know the system, but he went out, spent a week looking, and got a job.

Since coming to the House in 1983, I have taken a great interest in employment, investment, education and training, because they are closely linked. They are essential to UK plc's future and especially to our manufacturing industry, of which we have much in West Yorkshire.

As I have said, during the 1980s, manufacturing investment enabled us to achieve huge reductions in unemployment in my constituency of Batley and Spen. Between November 1986 and November 1987, unemployment dropped by 19 per cent. Between 1987 and 1988, it dropped by 27 per cent. and between 1988 and 1989, it dropped by 22 per cent. In the early 1990s, unemployment dropped by 13 and 5 per cent.

For the people involved, however, unemployment is individual. It is a traumatic time in their lives. They are not just a statistic. For them and their families, it means much heartache and grief about how they are going to manage, and the whole family suffers. Sometimes we become carried away with statistics and forget that we are speaking about individuals and their families, and we forget what a traumatic time it is for them.

In Yorkshire, there has been massive investment in industries. In my constituency, since 1984, well over £200 million has been invested in jobs, new processes, new technology, new factories—which are there for everyone to see—and of course training because what manufacturing company wants to invest a huge amount of money in a new factory, new technology and new equipment and then not bother with the work force? Many manufacturers say to me that the most important part of their business is their work force, because, without it, many of the machines, however clever, would not operate—of course, they realise that. If we had not invested in training, we would not be able to manufacture and export our high-quality goods around the world.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) insulted all people who have invested money in businesses. Suggesting that the only investment in the United Kingdom is in burger bars is outrageous. He should think carefully before making such a sweeping statement, especially as, if he went a little further around Yorkshire with some of his colleagues, he would see evidence of continuing massive investment.

We need to continue with training and education, but they must start in our schools, and continue with programmes and in our industries. We do not need to lecture industries about that. They know that and are already doing that work. The money that they have put into the investors in people schemes is a prime example. However, we also need to have retraining for people who become unemployed. Although everyone would mourn the loss of any scheme that comes for a short time and goes, the whole jigsaw of training, work and people is continually moving and, unless our response by way of programmes to that movement is continual, we shall become static and not gain the benefit.

In his winding-up speech, perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will say a word or two about how he sees the future of the TECs and encourage them to consider their budgets a little and to push a little more of that money into people's training.

9.9 pm

Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe (Bradford, South): We all agree that this is an important debate; but we are discussing real, damaging cuts—not imaginary cuts—and I am staggered by the complacency of Conservative Members. Hearing the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer wax lyrical about the enterprise culture, describing Britain as the enterprise capital of Europe, we can understand why the Tories are so far behind in the opinion polls: the simple reason is that they do not live in the real world inhabited by my constituents and by the majority of British people and their families.

The millions who are in work fear redundancy because companies have not invested in new technology, research and design and re-skilling programmes. Many parents would have been angered by the debate; they do not know what future their children have and whether they will make their way in the world. If there are no jobs, those children will have no prospects. As for the people who are unfortunate enough to be unemployed, they are confined to seeking temporary or part-time work involving low pay and long hours because of their lack of skills. That is a disgrace.

I do not believe there is such a thing as a one-nation Tory. Tories do not believe in society; they believe only in the development of the individual, and in a system based on greed, in which the big pussies can have fat pay cheques while the unemployed suffer cuts in benefit. The Tories have ceased to develop training programmes, and are attempting to create the illusion that everything is all right.

What is the Government's real motive for cutting training budgets? Could it be part of their economic strategy to keep a permanent pool of unemployed people to act as a stimulus to a low-wage economy? That is the Government's vision of Britain: they want to retain a divided society, so that they can claim some imagined success. Belatedly, some remorse has been shown by, in particular, the Deputy Prime Minister, who has called for a job skills audit. He has finally realised that Britain is slipping in the world prosperity league.

An alternative title for today's debate might be "The Waste of a Nation". The £20 billion that has been spent to keep people out of work could have been used to create real, permanent jobs. Every successful economy knows that, if success is to be maintained, there must be a structured and dynamic training and employment programme rather than stop-start schemes that merely massage the unemployment figures. There have been 32 changes in those figures. Even I could make unemployment apparently fall if I changed the calculation involved.

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): Does my hon. Friend find in his constituency, as I do in mine, that the very intonation with which young people utter the word "scheme" indicates the contempt that they feel for those devices for massaging the unemployment statistics?

Mr. Sutcliffe: Those of us who come from manufacturing constituencies knew the routes to employment: we knew that there was a prospect of work. Nowadays, young people see not the prospect of work but meaningless schemes that do not develop their skills.

More than 3 million people in Britain are unemployed, and 750,000 have been out of work for 12 months or more. My city must create 700 jobs just to stand still—a

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city with a proud manufacturing base that was decimated by the loss of 22,000 jobs in four years. Why have the Government something against manufacturing industry? As a consequence, they have destroyed many of our communities. The Secretary of State recognised that the north has been hit particularly badly.

In 1979, manufacturing represented 30 per cent. of gross domestic product; it now represents less than 20 per cent. We need only look at any industrial sector to see that the machinery for manufacturing is imported from our competitors in Europe or elsewhere in the world.

To cut the training budget as the Government have is to destroy the country's future. According to the survey, "Skill Needs in Britain", conducted at the Department's request, employers were concerned about the skills gap, and 21 per cent. of employers and companies with more than 25 employees thought that there was a significant gap between the skills possessed by their current work forces and those that they needed to meet their business objectives. Another study, conducted by the Business and Technology Education Council in August 1995, showed that 50 per cent. of firms employing more than 100 people thought that their profitability would be affected by skill shortages among very young workers. Out of the 21 countries in the OECD, the United Kingdom lags behind all but Turkey in the proportion of 17 and 18-year-olds in education. Currently, 180,000 17 and 18-year-olds are not receiving education, work or training. That is a national disgrace.

When the training and enterprise councils were set up, they took the money that would normally have gone to further education colleges and other provision through local authorities. The objective was to bring together public and private sector players, with the emphasis being placed on the high fliers in private sector chairing the TEC boards to provide business acumen to remove the shortfalls in the skills gap.

Bradford TEC has been very successful. It has a committed board that is determined to meet Bradford's needs, but in recent times the board has become frustrated as its resources have been reduced year by year. Its budget has been reduced by £1.8 million this year—a cut of 9.5 per cent. Incidentally, the training for work budget has been cut by 24 per cent., in a city with a rising population and above-average youth unemployment, especially among ethnic minority communities.

The Government have claimed radical change in the education and training sectors in the past 16 years, but the reality is different. They have created confusion on standards and they have depressed and sapped the morale of teachers, lecturers and training providers. Worst of all, they have thrown away all the golden opportunities given to them—for example, by North sea oil—to equip our country with a highly motivated, highly skilled work force capable of creating wealth, which would lead to investment and growth to revitalise Britain's economy.

The abolition of the community action programme will attack again the most vulnerable in our society. One in five households with a member of working age has nobody in work, compared with one in 12 in 1979. Those people have the right to work without the opportunity to work and that means that they have no stake in society. The community action programme had its critics, but it was set up by the Chancellor in 1993 to offer work to 40,000 unemployed people, and it has been seen to be working. The Government have shown that they lack the will and the ambition to support and build up education and skills for life.

I suppose that at the end of this month we shall see another relaunch for the Prime Minister. Like the rest of the relaunches, it will not work because he is out of touch and the Government are out of touch. A society in which as many as one third of the people are marginalised and cut off from the opportunity to secure worthwhile employment is a society that squanders the potential of people and the resources of its economy.

What have the Government got against trade unions? Why do they try to create conflict where it does not exist? Forty-seven of the top 50 companies in this country have union agreements and organised trade unions. We see the benefits of work forces working with their managements to re-skill, to introduce new technologies and to develop the ability to work together; yet the Government are caught up in political dogma. The cuts in the training budgets are damaging and will affect people. The Government do not care about unemployed people: they care only about maintaining their aspiration to look after the top 10 per cent. of the country. I believe that we shall see the return of a Labour Government who will make a commitment to training for people and ensuring that we have a structured training environment.

9.17 pm

Mr. David Evennett (Erith and Crayford): I am delighted to participate in this important debate, but I do not want to follow the depressing example of the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe). I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on her excellent speech and on putting on the record the facts and figures on jobs, vacancies and the number of people participating in post-16 training and education. It is a pity only that more hon. Members, especially from the Opposition, were not in the Chamber to hear those figures.

In today's fast-changing world, the speed of technological change has meant that training and education are even more important. Skills have to be updated in nearly all areas. For individuals to be able to meet today's challenges, there must be a change in the approach to education and training. The old idea of a job for life is, regrettably, no more. In addition, once qualified, people may have to be retrained. However, I welcome the many opportunities that our society offers today.

There are more opportunities for our people in training and education than ever before. I am appalled by Opposition Members and their depression. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) was all doom and gloom. Opposition Members never acknowledge the vast opportunities for education, training and retraining that are available now to the vast majority of people. The tremendous opportunities of today were just never available in the past.

As the world of work changes, so too must education and training change. Of course the young and the unemployed must be our top priority, but so must those who want to upgrade their skills and advance their opportunities. It is not only the Government and the taxpayer who should provide training, however. The Government have an important role, but so do industry.

business and commerce—as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock). I should like the private sector to do even more training and retraining.

The Government are to be congratulated on endeavouring to offer more opportunities and help to the young and the unemployed. The investment has been considerable: 1.5 million places in employment and training programmes in the public sector for the coming year. With the improving economic climate and falling unemployment, the future looks much brighter for people who are seeking work.

In my constituency and across the whole borough of Bexley local businesses feel increasingly optimistic about the economy. We are fortunate in having an excellent further education college. Bexley college, as it is now called, is primarily located in Erith; but under the successful leadership of Dr. Jim Healey and his team it has become a centre of excellence for education and training. The college's initiatives have helped to train and retrain many local people and given them the skills to assist them in their search for work.

It is vital that our education system equips our young people with the necessary foundations on which to build their careers and their lives. The education reforms of the past decade have tried to do just that. Apart from the introduction of the national curriculum, the publication of school results, testing and the increased amount of inspection of schools, much has also been achieved in vocational and technical education. There is no mention of these successes in the Opposition motion. Further training for specific jobs would be useless if the basic education had not been provided in the first place. At long last vocational qualifications of a high quality are being provided, and are increasingly accepted by employers, pupils and parents. GNVQs have at last won acceptance, which is very good news.

The greater independence of further education colleges such as Bexley college has allowed them to develop and to provide a wider variety of courses, thereby ensuring that the young, the not so young, the unemployed, and those who want to return to work after bringing up children can enrol in training courses, improve their qualifications and update their skills. That is vital to society and individuals alike. The work done by such colleges is to be commended. It is certainly valued by many people throughout the country.

I confess myself disappointed that the private sector does not do more training. Elsewhere, in America and Germany, private industry, commerce and business are much more geared to providing training and retraining for their work forces, and are prepared to sponsor more young people through college and university. I should like to see much more of the same here. Private organisations, as well as the Government, should do more training—a fact not mentioned by the Opposition because they believe the Government should do everything: the taxpayer should provide everything. I believe that there is a balance to be struck between the Government and the private sector, because it is essential for this country that we have a skilled, qualified work force.

There is much more to be done in the field of training, but we should also commend the good work that has already been achieved. I totally reject the Opposition's pretence that cuts in certain programmes will be the end of civilisation.

Mr. O'Hara: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Evennett: I am afraid not, because I must leave time for the Front-Bench spokesmen.

Education and training are and must be at the forefront of an opportunity society. Economic success, low inflation, growth and an entrepreneurial approach are the keys to lasting jobs. We are after lasting, long-term jobs and not short-term, temporary ones. It can be terribly depressing for people who have been on a training scheme to get short-term work, only to find themselves back on the unemployed list. It is unfair; in fact, it is cruel. Our training should be aimed at long-term, worthwhile and vital jobs.

To listen to Opposition Members, one would think that the Government have abandoned all their training facilities, and advice and assistance to young people and those seeking work—whether young or not so young. That is ridiculous. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State described in great detail the training provisions and facilities that are being developed and are available for those who are unemployed or leaving school and college.

As well as training, the importance of assistance and practical help in finding work must be paramount. Jobseekers need help and advice, which they can often find at jobcentres. We have very good ones in Bexley where people regularly go and are given tremendous help. Job clubs, too, are vital in encouraging and helping people, especially with curriculum vitae, in gaining confidence and completing applications. As well as training in particular skills, people need help and advice. I welcome the opportunities available to help and advise people who are looking for work. Many of my hon. Friends have already cited the long list of available schemes for training and retraining and I shall not repeat them in view of the pressure on time.

The Government have achieved a great deal in education and training. An improving economy, education reforms and relevant training are the foundations for getting unemployed people back into work—whether young or not so young. In looking to the private sector to do more, we should encourage private sector companies to ensure that their workers are trained and retrained in the necessary skills.

As I am sure my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will say, the most important part of the debate has been the fact that it has made it abundantly clear that the Opposition are totally bankrupt of any ideas about training or retraining. Of course they want to spend more taxpayers' money. They want to spend more on just about everything in their portfolios, although they do not like to admit it in public.

We want a good training and retraining programme—which I believe that we have—that will allow people to amend and update their skills and get long-term, worthwhile jobs.

9.26 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): I could scarcely believe my ears when the Secretary of State opted to

[Mr. Michael Meacher]

promote her case in the debate by taking a stand on the unemployment record of the past 15 years. One would never guess if one listened to the right hon. Lady that under Labour, unemployment scarcely ever rose above 1 million, whereas under the Tories unemployment has scarcely ever been below 2 million in the past 15 years.

One would never guess if one listened to the Secretary of State that there have been 25 or more changes in the unemployment figures, which according to the independent Library estimates, have added about 900,000 to the employment count. The real rate of unemployment is not 8 per cent. but probably nearer 11 per cent., and certainly one of the highest in Europe.

We were treated to a selective list of the worst black spots of unemployment abroad—while of course ignoring our own—amnesia, a re-writing of recent economic history in Britain and a cavalier dismissal of the central fact that, despite tiny falls in unemployment in recent months, unemployment remains. *[Interruption.]* This is the key point. Unemployment remains at an historical high, which is totally unacceptable.

The Secretary of State also said that the Government have given people rights and opportunities. I would say that the Government have done more to take away rights, stability and security than any Government since the 1930s. There has been a doubling in the number of those on low wages, a tripling in homelessness, 1 million people have been trapped in negative equity, and millions have been exposed to job insecurity caused by the Government's deregulation of the labour markets. Perhaps worst of all, 14 million people—a quarter of our entire population—are living on income support, which for an adult is just £46 a week. As my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) rightly said, social and economic policies have generated welfare dependency. It is incredible that the Secretary of State should say that the biggest stake that people have in society is a job, when the Government's record on unemployment is worse than that of any other Government since the 1930s.

At the centre of the debate has been the serious and damaging overall cut in departmental expenditure and its impact particularly on training for the adult unemployed. Overall, the departmental budget will be cut by £150 million in the next financial year. If one compares next year's budget with what was previously planned, the cut is £430 million. At a time when education, training and employment are widely seen as the key to national recovery, those figures speak volumes about the Government's priorities.

The main burden of the cuts will fall on employment and training, which will lose up to £120 million as a result of reductions in the allocated budget, as the Government have admitted, of 4 per cent. The adult unemployed will bear the brunt of that cut. The original figure planned for expenditure on training for work in 1994-95 was £724 million. The planned figure for training for work next year—1996-97—was stated by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget speech two months ago to be down to £488 million. Compared with the actual expenditure just two years ago, the planned expenditure on training for work in the coming year—and the outturn may well be lower—is being cut by no less than 30 per cent.

That provides a rather different impression from the bland and complacent excuse trotted out by the Secretary of State, that a 4 per cent. cut in employment and training programmes must be seen in the context of what Ministers rather coyly describe as a welcome 12 per cent. fall in long-term unemployment in the past year. Of course, as I made clear earlier, Ministers have a great deal to be coy about. The Secretary of State did not answer the point that I made earlier and she is not paying attention now, although I am not surprised because it is an extremely embarrassing point. The only reason for any fall in unemployment in the past three years is that the Government were forced, kicking and screaming, to abandon the exchange rate mechanism in September 1992. To quote the fall in long-term unemployment as justifying abandoning the community action programme or cutting other training programmes is irrelevant, because the fall in unemployment was wholly due to the lower interest rates and exchange rates that that permitted. It had nothing to do with the Government's employment and training programme.

Another reason why the Government's rationale for cuts in training and employment budgets is transparent and shabby is that it suggests that unemployment and skills shortages are problems that are well on the way to being satisfactorily resolved, so expenditure can be safely reduced. The truth is rather more sobering. The fall in unemployment is flattening out at the still extremely high level of 2.25 million—that is on the Government's account—which is 500,000 above the low point of the previous cycle, and there are still about 800,000 people who have been unemployed for more than a year. With the exception of the short-lived blip in 1989, unemployment in this country has not been below 2 million in the past 15 years. That is an appalling record and certainly does not warrant any let-up in programmes designed to reduce unemployment.

The idea that our training programmes are now so satisfactory that we can afford to reduce them is preposterous. The United Kingdom currently invests about 0.6 per cent. of GDP on labour market measures. Germany and France invest twice as much and many other European states invest even more. The UK would need to raise spending by £4 billion to £5 billion to come into line with the European average.

In many ways, the picture is even more stark. More than one in two workers in Germany hold vocational qualifications at craft level, whereas in Britain only one in five do. Two thirds of foremen in German manufacturing industry hold higher intermediary qualifications, whereas in the UK the figure is just 3 per cent.—one twentieth of the level in Germany. *[Interruption.]* Had the Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth), been present at the start of my speech, he would have heard me say that the House of Commons Library estimates that the real unemployment rate is well above the Government's 8 per cent. figure and probably nearer 11 per cent.

I could continue with such comparisons. Compared with that of our international competitors, our training record is still badly deficient and trailing. There is no justification for cutting our training budget against the background of such a large and prolonged shortfall in skills training. Evidence shows that the skills shortage is growing. In 1992, 5 per cent. of companies reported some hard-to-fill vacancies. In 1993, the figure was 6 per cent.

and in 1994, it was 11 per cent. In 1994, the "Skill Needs in Britain" survey showed that one person in five had no in-work training whatever. Moreover, an Industrial Society survey showed that, in the same year, employers spent only £380 a year on training per employee compared with £490 only 18 months before. Far from breaking through the skills training gap, the Government are compounding the slide in this country's skills training in the workplace by cutting the employment and training programme.

It is not just about money; it is also about the fundamental question of what existing training programmes really achieve. Training for work has largely become a job placement programme for people who are already job prepared, while few opportunities exist for those who are not. My hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney made that point eloquently in his speech. The Government's current focus on job outputs within a short time scale inevitably discourages the recruitment of anyone who is not ready to go straight into a job. The result is that the extent of value added and of skills produced by that system is often negligible. As the Government say, improved job outcomes are being recorded, but less training activity is being delivered.

Provision for special training needs is in a bad way. Contracting for the special needs of adults is now undertaken largely to meet a numbers quota. Even specialist providers say that they can no longer afford to meet the requirements of people with special training needs. In addition, the voluntary sector providers who make available the majority of places for special training needs are being squeezed out of the training market, with substantial cuts in both income and places on adult and youth training programmes. As a result, programmes steer clear of the long-term unemployed and the special training needs population, who should be the most important customers of all. That, probably even more than money, is the central flaw in the Government's current training strategy.

The other key issue is that of money.

The Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): Ah.

Mr. Meacher: I am glad that the Minister says, "Ah." Perhaps he is paying attention for once.

The money to deliver the output is simply not available. As a result, basic and higher skills training has been severely reduced, to the extent that in many areas it does not exist, even where there is labour market demand and skill shortages. A national survey of TECs carried out recently in my constituency of Oldham found that the number of places last year decreased by 21 per cent. compared with the previous year. I could go through the whole list—33 per cent. in Manchester and up to 34 per cent. in Barnsley and Doncaster. That has happened not just over the past year; funding has continuously declined for the past five years.

In that time, the budget for adult training has been halved, while the level of unemployment has marginally increased. In 1991, the budget for employment training, which was the forerunner of training for work, was just over £1 billion. Unemployment in that year was just under 2.3 million; last year it was, on average, slightly over 2.3 million. Yet the average payment per trainee has fallen, year on year, from £50 in 1992-93 to £28 last year. I am even told that one provider who has had a contract since 1991 for the same provision shows that the contract price per trainee per week has been reduced from £84 to £30. It is impossible to provide a quality skills training programme with cuts on that scale.

The debate has exposed fundamental weaknesses and failings in Britain's current training system that Government policy, especially the continued funding cuts, has clearly exacerbated. Several radical changes are urgently needed. First, output-related funding dominates all other measures of performance. It is distorting the system away from providing longer-term skills and quality in favour of short-term jobs. Moreover, a successful outcome is assumed even if the job lasts only a week and irrespective of what sort of job is involved, how much is to be paid, and whether the person is to work full time, part time or whatever. The system needs to be dropped or at least radically changed.

It is also unacceptable that almost two thirds of youth trainees leave schemes before they end; half find no job at all; and another half have no qualifications to show for it when they leave training. We need a new criterion of performance that takes much more account of the qualifications gained.

Mr. Rowlands: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Meacher: I am reluctant to give way because I have so little time. I do not intend to take more than a few minutes. There is an urgent need for stable funding—a point about which my hon. Friend waxed most eloquent, when he said that there is constant chopping and changing and great uncertainty in TEC budgets for that reason.

The Government's continually changing funding criteria for TECs make it difficult for them to plan ahead. Knowing the Government as we do, nobody was surprised when it emerged a few weeks ago that their latest wheeze for compensating for fresh cuts in the TECs budget was to start to fund special training needs courses from the national lottery.

I shall quote from a letter to the chief executive of the National Lottery Charities Board from the director of policy at the TEC National Council. It states:

"The Earl of Stockton has provided my office with a copy of the correspondence between David Sieff"—

the Marks and Spencer chief who chairs the National Lottery Charities Board—

"and himself concerning the possibilities of TECs working in partnership with local eligible organisations to develop programmes for re-skilling the disadvantaged that might be considered for grants from the National Lottery Charities Board."

One would have thought that even this Government would regard that as more of an eccentricity, or even a joke, than a serious policy.

Special training needs must be better safeguarded. Several options should be urgently considered, such as a separate programme for the most needy, ring-fencing of money for their training and greater concentration on basic skills training. One or other of those should be adopted.

Lastly—

Mr. Evennett: Hear, hear.

Mr. Meacher: I am taking less time than did some Conservative Members.

[Mr. Meacher]

Lastly, we strongly deplore the premature closure of the community action programme, which offers 40,000 to 50,000 people a year work experience, individually tailored help with finding a job, work projects of benefit to the community that would not otherwise be done and priority access for people with disabilities. Indeed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) said at the start of the debate, only a year ago the then Secretary of State for Employment announced that it would be extended for a further three years at a cost of £70 million a year. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Government are now much more motivated to make savings for tax cuts than to preserve employment programmes, when even the then Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo) of all people, regarded the programme as valuable enough to extend for another three years.

Improvement in the quality and coverage of training should be at centre stage for our national economic recovery. The Government have manifestly failed the nation in both the scale and quality of training provision, which still falls far short of that of our international competitors. If the Government's record and the wheedling excuses made for it by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment are the best that they can do, the sooner the election throws them out, the better.

9.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. James Paice): Today's debate, albeit brief, has provided the House with a wonderful opportunity to highlight the contrast between the Government's successful and real policies to help the unemployed and promote training with the dearth of policy suggestions from the Labour party.

I shall start by examining the central issue of cuts in training in the Labour motion. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment said, in real terms there will be more money in the budgets for TEC programmes next year than there is this year. [HON. MEMBERS: "They have been cut."] There has been no cut in the overall amount of money for TEC programmes.

Mr. Blunkett: That is not true.

Mr. Paice: There has been no cut in real terms; rather, there has been a 5 per cent. increase in the overall amount of money for TEC programmes.

We are proposing to shift money between programmes because of the shifting priorities in the needs of the unemployed, because of the fall in unemployment and the increasing value and importance that are attached to modern apprenticeships, to which we are adding another £115 million. The Government have always recognised that we must catch up with the skill levels of our competitors, which was why we have concentrated on reforming the education and training system to deliver better results. We have merged the Department for Education and the Department of Employment, because we recognise that they go hand in hand in meeting the competitive challenge from the rest of the world.

We have achieved great things. More than 90 per cent. of 16-year-olds are now in education and training. Almost one in three of our young people go on to higher education, compared to one in eight in 1979, and twice as many of them get A-levels as in 1979.

Of all the accusations and challenges that have been thrown at the Government by the Opposition this evening, the accusation that an approach has been made to use the lottery to fund training for special needs must be resolved immediately. The TEC National Council has already made it absolutely clear, publicly and for all to hear, that that accusation is totally without foundation. That fallacious story has arisen because the National Lottery Charities Board approached one TEC for the names of organisations that are involved in helping the disadvantaged.

I must confess that I was somewhat surprised when I heard that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) would sum up for the Opposition. He has never made any secret of his disagreement with what, we are led to believe, is Labour party policy. In his remarks this evening, he referred critically to the deregulation of the labour market. One can assume from that that he opposes it, but I have heard absolutely no pledge from the Labour party in recent months that it intends to reverse the deregulation that we have carried out. The hon. Member for Oldham, West has said:

"Mrs. Thatcher's abiding achievement has been to turn the Opposition into a variation of the Government's theme."

He went on to say:

"People want real change, not a paler shade of the same."

Only last month, the hon. Member for Oldham, West appeared on "Kilroy" and was challenged about Labour's proposal to give employers £60 a week to take on the long-term unemployed, while the long-term unemployed would receive only £45 in benefit. According to the *Oldham Evening Chronicle*, which I am led to believe is a learned journal, the hon. Gentleman's reply was:

"Let me make it clear to you. I am embarrassed by that point."

Why is he on the Front Bench?

The intervention that the hon. Gentleman made in the speech of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about our exit from the exchange rate mechanism begs another question: why is it that Italy, which came out of the ERM at the same time, has seen unemployment continue to rise while ours has been falling dramatically? Could it have more to do with the state of the labour market than the ERM?

The hon. Gentleman also referred to unemployment figures and suggested that the real ones were much higher than those which we announce. If that is so, why do the labour force survey figures, which we also announce regularly and which have gone along closely with the claimant count figures, meet the requirements of the International Labour Organisation, to which the Labour party and the Trades Union Congress have signed up?

A number of hon. Members have rightly emphasised the need for this country to improve and increase our training and to meet the national training targets. The Government have never made any secret of their intention to achieve that. I wish to deal with a misunderstanding—a fallacy—promoted by the hon. Members for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) and for Bath (Mr. Foster) that programmes for the unemployed can, on their own, address the need to meet our training targets.

We should remember that only 3 per cent. of the work force are long-term unemployed—the figure is still too high, but it is 3 per cent. Some 92 per cent. of the work

force are in work. If we are to meet the targets for the year 2000, we shall do so by providing encouragement, exhortation and help to all the work force.

Business spends about £20 billion a year on training and education. The Confederation of British Industry estimates that the figure is £28 billion, but I shall settle for our figure of £20 billion. We must develop a culture that is based on better schooling and achievement in compulsory education through our education reforms. That process will lead to the understanding that training is, as the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney said, an investment, not a cost.

I must take issue with the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney for suggesting that the private sector had been cutting training. That is a historical fact, but it has not been the experience of the recent recession, when training expenditure by the private sector held up far higher than in any previous recession. That demonstrates that the message is getting through to the employers that they must invest.

My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) made what must be considered as one of the best speeches in the House for a long time when he emphasised the fall in unemployment and described in graphic detail the tremendous successes and developments of the Government's training policy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) emphasised the varied needs of the unemployed. She also expressed concerns over TECs, particularly the cost of their administration and bureaucracy. All TECs must publish annual reports to highlight those figures and they must all hold annual public meetings where their staff are open to cross-examination by the people in the community. I am anxious that as many resources as possible are spent on training, not wasted on administration. TECs have a vital role to play in developing our training infrastructure and needs—as they have for the past few years.

My hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) rightly referred to the importance of sound, basic education and highlighted the independence of our further education colleges. One of the most exciting aspects of my job is when I travel around the country and college after college tells me of the wonderful success that it has made of independence.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Hear, hear.

Mr. Paice: Understandably, my hon. Friend says, "Hear, hear." I was privileged to visit the college in her constituency just before Christmas, and there people were very proud of the independence that the Government had given them.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) said that he wanted a serious debate on training. I do not know what happened to his intentions, because it did not materialise. He suggested that the country needs a high-skill economy, and we would entirely agree. It is absurd to suggest that we can compete, with a low-wage economy, with the countries of the far east. No one has pretended that we can do so.

What matters are unit labour costs. Those include non-wage costs. Let me remind the hon. Gentleman that, in the United Kingdom, non-wage labour costs in manufacturing are about 15 per cent. of unit labour costs. In France they are 29 per cent., in Germany they are 24 per cent., in Spain they are 25 per cent. and, yes, even in Singapore they are 16.6 per cent.

The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney mentioned changes in our programmes and spoke about overnight cuts. Talk about overnight cuts sits ill in the mouth of the man who was Minister when the International Monetary Fund came in to administer cuts in this country.

We have not heard of any policies from the Labour party. We have heard nothing about the much-vaunted welfare to work programme. That, of course, is a programme about subsidies to employers. I am puzzled that the Opposition can propose a policy advocating subsidies to employers that seems to me to recognise that employment costs are a deterrent to employment, at the same time as they advocate policies that would lead to dramatic increases in the costs of employment. Those policies are the minimum wage, which the whole House knows will increase the costs of employment; the social chapter—

Mr. Meacher: The Minister does not know what the level will be.

Mr. Paice: If the level is not high enough to increase the cost of employment, it will not be much of a minimum wage, will it? Any minimum wage that increases wages, which I presume is the intention behind it, will increase costs and therefore reduce employment.

The social chapter would impose more potential costs on employers. Is it not odd that we have received no explanation of the statement that the Leader of the Opposition made to the Confederation of British Industry that he would not agree to any extra burden on employers, even though he would join the social chapter—as though he could pick and choose? Does not he realise, does not the hon. Member for Oldham, West understand, that the social chapter involves qualified majority voting? What wonderful system has the Labour party now invented that would prevent Britain being outvoted and saddled with job-destroying burdens?

We have heard nothing of the windfall tax, Labour's latest milch cow—a tax which, at the last count, was going to fund 11 different spending pledges, a £75 a week incentive for long-term unemployed people, child care provision, VAT relief to small business, an environmental task force and many other things, including, apparently, the removal of lead piping. The Leader of the Opposition advocates a programme of home insulation.

What a tax. What a con trick. Do not the Opposition understand that a principle of a windfall tax is that it is a once and for all tax? How will they fund those programmes in the following years?

What about the other Labour flagship, the training levy—another impost on employers because Labour knows best? Yet again, we find confusion. The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) said last year, when she was in charge:

"We have concluded that the old levy/grant system is no longer appropriate".

We have heard no policy of substance tonight—no explanation of what stakeholder training might be. The Government have trebled the proportion of graduates. We have developed modern apprenticeships and we have

[Mr. Paice]

focused employers' responsibility for training through the investors in people initiative. We have abolished all the statutory levies and training boards and we have seen a rise in training volume and quality.

Yet we have been opposed at every turn—as least we were opposed until the Labour party realised that we were right. After 16 years, Labour now accepts that the levy will not work. How much longer will the minimum wage or the social chapter last before they, too, are consigned to the dustbin of Labour policies?

The Government remain committed to an effective training policy which we shall continue to deliver through TECs and the extra money that they shall receive next year. I commend the amendment to the House.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 269, Noes 306.

Division No. 25] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berningham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Oliner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy

Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Cummings and
Ms Ann Coffey.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter

Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Derek Conway and
Mr. Simon Burns.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the fall in unemployment and rise in employment that have enabled more people to share in the benefits of economic growth; supports the Government's determination to give unemployed people the help they need to find work; and welcomes the Government's initiatives to raise standards of education and training and enhance the nation's competitiveness.

Algrade Trust

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Knapman.]*

10.15 pm

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): I am grateful for this opportunity to raise an extremely disturbing case involving the abuse and exploitation of handicapped people at a private care institution in my constituency by people who profess to be fundamentalist Christians.

This affair exposes serious shortcomings in the supervision of charities in Scotland; it shows that it can be far too easy for unscrupulous operators to misappropriate Department of Social Security funds; and it demonstrates that it is far too difficult for local authorities to ensure that handicapped people get proper care in such institutions.

The Algrade story is a major scandal, and the Minister must institute an urgent inquiry so that proper safeguards can be put into effect as soon as possible.

The Algrade home is near the village of Humbie at the foot of the Lammermuir hills. The site was originally developed as a holiday village for children from Edinburgh, and from a distance it looks idyllic.

The Algrade trust was established in 1968 with the stated objective of providing for the

"spiritual, physical and material welfare and education of the mentally handicapped".

The top priority given to spiritual welfare later turned out to be significant, and, I fear, sinister.

The home was registered under the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 for residential and day care, and in recent years there have been around 33 residents and 10 day attenders. Many of the residents went to Humbie as children 30 years ago, and they have lived virtually all their lives at the home.

Families trusted the Algrade trust, and particularly the resident trustees, Miss Betty Waugh and Mrs. Rosa Frisby, to provide for the welfare of these handicapped young people. But I fear that things went badly wrong.

Over a period of years, the local social work authority, Lothian regional council, became more and more dissatisfied with the management at Algrade. The council tried to persuade the trust to improve its care arrangements, but the social work department ran into fierce resistance from the trustees, particularly Miss Waugh and Mrs. Frisby, who claimed that they had guidance from a superior, divine authority.

In 1984, the council became so concerned about poor standards of care and management, and inadequate and inappropriate staffing, that drastic action had to be taken. The council's ultimate power was to withdraw the Algrade home's registration under the Social Work (Scotland) Act, but there was a risk that the trust could carry on regardless by claiming housing benefit for its residents instead of DSS funding.

That course of action was actually threatened by Mr. John White, who had joined the Algrade team as an adviser in 1987. I understand that Mr. White has recently folded his Care Management Advisory Service company, and that his record elsewhere includes an incident in which an old lady was scalded to death in a bath in a

home that he owned. He subsequently claimed that the fact that she had a private bath was proof of the quality of her care. The man seems to be a complete chancer, and a callous one at that. He is still operating the Grey Tree trust in Ross-on-Wye, with substantial funding from the Home Office. The authorities should check on all his affairs thoroughly.

Returning to Algrade, Lothian regional council was in a difficult position. Even if it could have closed the Algrade operation, it would not have had the resources to provide alternative care and accommodation for the residents. Nevertheless, further pressure on the trust, including reports to the police and to the Scottish Charities Office, led to the resignation of the old trustees, the appointment of new trustees, the transfer of the management of the home to the Board of Social Responsibility of the Church of Scotland, and, finally, the transfer of the residents to better accommodation made available by the council at Inveresk.

Lothian regional council and the Church of Scotland have fulfilled their responsibilities fully and in difficult circumstances, with precious little help from the Scottish Charities Office. I tabled parliamentary questions in July and November last year, and the replies from the Lord Advocate and the Minister were hopelessly unsatisfactory. We are still waiting for action to deal with serious financial irregularities in the Algrade trust—and remember: the DSS has been paying more than £400,000 a year to that thoroughly dodgy organisation.

It is important that the House and the Minister should understand just how awful the position at Algrade had become. We are not discussing minor lapses or mistakes. This has been a story of serious exploitation, abuse and fraud.

For a start, the accommodation was dreadful. When I visited Humbie just after the management was taken over by Church of Scotland social workers last year, I saw primitive conditions, inadequate and probably dangerous electric wiring, and pitiful heating. In February 1994, Lothian regional council found that the temperature in the living accommodation was just 6 deg C, well below the statutory minimum for places of work. It is a mercy that the residents were moved into better housing before the big freeze at the end of December 1995.

The catering was basic, to put it mildly. I understand that the trust took advantage of the free European Community surplus food scheme to put £50,000-worth of horsemeat on residents' plates over five years—at least, we presume it was horsemeat; the residents described it as pony.

The trust's outlandish religious culture was probably the main priority, and the handicapped residents were manipulated shamelessly. Those who did not comply could be subjected to cruel punishments, and there are even more serious allegations of sexual abuse by a senior carer who worked at Humbie for 10 years. Amazingly, he was protected by the original trustees.

Staffing at the home was, at best, inadequate. One of the oddest features of this operation was its ability to spend such a low proportion of its income on the care of its residents. Although Mr. John White was maximising the trust's claim for DSS and other funding to more than £420,000 a year, the trust's expenditure on staffing was just £36,000 a year. Spending on staff usually accounts for about 70 per cent. of care home budgets, but at Algrade the figure was 10 per cent., so staff costs were extraordinarily cheap.

Expenditure on food must have been pretty low, too, with all that free EC horsemeat or whatever. We know that heating costs must have been minimal, that the residents had little pocket money, and that there is no evidence of investment in the buildings at Humbie, so where did all the money go?

I believe that large sums of money that should have been spent on the care of handicapped people have been diverted into the former trustees' religious organisation, and into property that now belongs to individual former trustees. I understand that about 17 properties, worth about £2 million, in and around the village of Pathhead may have been acquired in that way. I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke), who represents Pathhead, is present. That property in Pathhead includes the high street café, which is exotically named, "The Video and Satellite Ministry".

That "Ministry" seems to be a combination of the former trustees' brand of fundamentalism and material beamed from kindred spirits in the United States of America. When I visited the café last year, my main concern was for a group of handicapped young people from the Humbie home who were working in the café clad in absurd tartan uniforms. The ex-trustee who met me there, Mrs. Frisby, had obviously prompted them carefully and effectively to tell me that they wanted to return to the care of the former regime at Algrade. She went further. She cited divine guidance for her mission. Those "helpers"—I understand that they were paid £5 for a seven-day week—seem to be vulnerable people, who are being exploited and manipulated.

Apart from milking their handicapped residents' DSS funding, the former trustees used other tactics. I have now seen evidence that a blind elderly relative of a day attender was bamboozled into signing a will leaving his house to Miss Waugh, and there are more stories about wills and unconventional property conveyancing that deserve attention.

All that has been perpetrated in the name of Christianity and "spiritual welfare", which is shameful; it has also been done by a registered Scottish charity with substantial funding from the DSS, which is intolerable. I pay tribute to Lothian regional council for its vigilance and persistence, which has led to the removal of the previous trustees and the provision of better care and accommodation for those 33 handicapped people.

That must not be the end of the story, however. About £2 million of public money intended for the care of handicapped people has apparently been pocketed by the trust or embezzled by former trustees. That money must be recovered and made available for its original purpose. I want to know why the Scottish Charities Office, which has had plenty of information about the affair for 14 months, has still taken no action.

I submit that either the DSS or local authorities should be able to audit and, if necessary, directly control money paid to private care agencies, of which there are now a good many. Moreover, this outrageous story includes a number of allegations of criminal offences: such offences should lead to prosecutions.

The people who have suffered neglect, exploitation and worse at the hands of the Algrade trust are entitled to expect appropriate action and fair compensation. It is imperative for lessons to be learned from this affair, to ensure that nothing like it can happen again anywhere in

[Mr. John Home Robertson]

Britain. I appeal to the Minister to consider the matter carefully, and also to study further evidence that will appear in the BBC's "Frontline Scotland" programme on Thursday. I am grateful for the BBC's help in researching the affair, and to the Edinburgh *Evening News*, which has also taken an interest in it over the past year.

I appreciate that the Minister may not be in a position to announce specific action tonight, but I trust that he will accept that the Government have a duty to deal with a scandal of such proportions.

10.27 pm

Mr. Eric Clarke (Midlothian): I shall be brief, but I wish to identify myself with this affair, because Pathhead is in my constituency.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) on raising this terrible matter. Constituents in Pathhead drew my attention to it, fearing a gradual takeover of the village following the organisation's purchase of houses: they were afraid that it would be institutionalised under the auspices of the Algrade trust. The exploitation of the youngsters in the café was also drawn to our attention; what we did not know about was the abuse and cruelty meted out to handicapped children. That must be the greatest fear of the parents and grandparents of such children.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian that an in-depth inquiry is the only way in which to satisfy the public and those representing them here. If criminal charges result from accusations of sexual assault, the cases concerned should go to trial. The misappropriation of funds must also be investigated, and the activities of the misguided religious zealots must cease immediately.

10.29 pm

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I congratulate the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) on his success in securing this debate. I welcome this opportunity provided by him to set out the position on the Algrade trust and the action which has been taken. I am also grateful for the comments of the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke).

The Algrade home at Humbie in East Lothian opened in 1968 as a residential school for children with learning difficulties. It developed into providing accommodation also for adults, many of whom had been educated at Algrade. When it was established, it was well regarded by many residents, parents and independent parties. As a consequence, it was popular, and places in the home were sought after.

The home had charitable status, and was run by a group of trustees. Until mid-1995, it was run by its founding trustees. In 1982, the home was approved to provide 44 residential places and 70 day care places, but there has been a gradual reduction in the numbers, so that latterly Algrade provided accommodation for 33 adults.

As a social work establishment, Algrade was registered with the relevant social work authority—Lothian regional council—for most of its history. Thorough and regular inspections were carried out from the late 1980s, and shortcomings were identified. These shortcomings related to management arrangements, staffing, the form of care, and general standards within the home. Meetings were held between the social work department and the trustees to discuss and agree on improvements. On each occasion, the trustees undertook to make the necessary improvements, but this did not always happen. Some improvements were made, but other points had to be returned to regularly.

In the 1990s, the concern of the registering authority increased, and serious concerns were reported by the social work department to Lothian social work committee.

In August 1993, Lothian social work authority decided that no further admissions should be made to Algrade. In September, the social work authority informed the chairman that one of the founding trustees should cease to have any involvement in the management of Algrade. She did not step down as asked. In 1994 the social work authority made a number of inspections, some unannounced, and held meetings with the trustees in order to keep a close eye on the implementation of recommendations for the improvement of the running of the home.

In October 1994, following further inspection, the social work authority gave notice to the board of trustees that the property could not continue to be used as a residential home. The reason was that the premises did not meet the necessary requirements. The building was not wind and watertight, and there were signs of damp in all the buildings. The heating was inadequate, and, in the winter months, temperatures were unacceptably low. Food storage and eating arrangements were unsatisfactory. There was also concern about the management, which had failed to comply with requirements.

In view of the importance of improving the management arrangements for the home, the social work authority approached the Church of Scotland, which very nobly agreed to take on the management of the home. This it did in October 1994.

I express my thanks to the Church of Scotland for stepping into this most difficult situation, for which it was in no way responsible. It placed its experience at the disposal of the trustees in order to bring about very necessary improvements. The new trustees are now responsible for the management of Algrade, and I have full confidence in their commitment and competence.

The Church of Scotland set as its main priority finding alternative accommodation for the residents. Many were attached to the community in Humbie, and had built up local friendships. However, it was important that their living conditions should be of a good standard.

The social work authority identified Wedderburn house in Musselburgh as a suitable temporary alternative. It was formerly a residential home for adults with learning difficulties, and was owned by the council. The regional council proposed to lease Wedderburn house to the trustees of the Algrade trust at a peppercorn rent of £1 a year. The Secretary of State's consent to this was received within a week of the proposal from the regional council.

The region's property committee gave its approval three weeks later. Some refurbishment was required, and the residents moved into their new home on 19 December 1995. Wedderburn house will now provide a home for the former residents of Algrade, for up to two years. In this

time, discussions will take place between the social work department and the trustees about more permanent accommodation arrangements.

The social work authority was also concerned about the arrangements for administering and looking after the money of residents at Algrade. The director of social work submitted a report to the Scottish Charities Office in October 1994. This was its first involvement. The Scottish Charities Office is a division of the Crown Office, established in 1992 and responsible for the supervision of charities and charities legislation. This legislation allows the Lord Advocate to make inquiries into concerns about misconduct or mismanagement in the administration of charities.

The report from the director of social work was not sufficient on its own to found a case. The Scottish Charities Office therefore initiated its own investigation. The allegations are complex, and are being investigated in detail by the Scottish Charities Office. Following the initiation of the investigation, the original trustees resigned, and, as I said, have been replaced by new trustees.

I pay tribute again to the new trustees, who have backgrounds in teaching, accountancy and medicine. They have taken on a difficult situation, and are already in discussion with the social work department, parents and guardians of residents. The new trustees have also been working with the Scottish Charities Office in its investigation of the previous administration.

The intervention of the Scottish Charities Office demonstrates our new charities legislation in action. It has allowed the charity to continue to function in the interests of those it looks after. It has saved the charity, in the best interests of its beneficiaries. It is investigating the allegations fully and fairly, in the interests of justice for the trustees. It would be wrong for me to comment further on the possible outcome of an investigation that is still in hand. If the hon. Member for East Lothian has evidence of fraud or embezzlement, he should send it to the proper authorities—in this case, the Lord Advocate—as a matter of duty.

On account of the complexities, the matters have been taking some time, but the resources of the Scottish Charities Office are sufficient for the work load. I am satisfied that there are no fundamental shortcomings in the supervision of charities legislation.

I turn to the allegations of sexual and other abuse.

Mr. Home Robertson *rose—*

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: May I answer some of the other points made by the hon. Gentleman? He can intervene later.

We regard the allegations of sexual and other abuse as very serious. I understand that, in October 1994, a resident made an allegation of sexual abuse against a male member of staff. The police investigated it and interviewed the member of staff concerned. The resident, however, withdrew the allegation, and the police had no basis on which to take forward the case.

More recently, as the residents have got used to the new arrangements and their confidence in the new Church of Scotland staff has grown, they have started to talk about their experiences, and eight complaints have been made about the same member of the former staff who was concerned in the earlier allegation. The police are now investigating those complaints through their women and children unit, and are treating the complaints seriously. The member of staff ceased working there in October 1994.

The residents have also made other allegations of a serious nature. Those include physical abuse, being made to stand out of doors at night in underwear as a form of punishment, and the expression of concern about aspects of their diets. There has also been a complaint that the father of a man attending on a day basis at Algrade was pressurised to alter his will, linking it to the arrangements for the future long-term care of his son.

All those complaints are being investigated by Lothian and Borders police, who are working closely with the Scottish Charities Office, Lothian region social work department and, of course, the Church of Scotland. As all the allegations are under investigation, it would be wrong for me to comment on them.

The present position is that there are new trustees, new management in the form of the Church of Scotland, and new premises at Wedderburn house. Investigations are being pursued into allegations of sexual abuse and fraud. We are anxious to see what lessons need to be learned. In particular, I am asking the chief inspector of social work to visit the Church of Scotland so that we may learn what lessons its members think could usefully be learned in the light of their current responsibility for the residents.

I turn to the general issues raised by the case. As I have already said, we do not yet know fully what lessons may be learned. We are, however, clear about the importance of the inspection and registration function of local authorities in detecting and dealing with any problems which may arise in residential care homes. The Secretary of State is about to issue guidance to all authorities, particularly aimed at the new authorities, on their statutory responsibilities for inspection. It describes the key tasks to be carried out, giving particular attention to the issues that may be raised following reorganisation.

In addition, a Scottish Office internal working party, which includes full representation of outside interests, including the Church of Scotland, is discussing possible changes in registration arrangements for residential care homes. That working party reflects the issues raised with certain residential care homes and nursing homes for elderly people, but its remit extends more widely. It will certainly take account of any lessons which may be learned from Algrade. The group will be making recommendations to me and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State very shortly. It might be helpful if I set out the current arrangements.

Local authorities are required to register private and voluntary residential homes. Registration is required where the whole or a substantial part of an establishment's function is to provide personal care or support as part of a planned programme.

As part of the overall responsibility for maintaining standards, the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 identifies three main aspects to which an authority should give particular consideration. Those who own and control an establishment should be "fit" persons to carry on the establishment; the premises should be "fit" for the purpose for which they are registered and the level and experience of the staffing should be appropriate; and registration should have regard to the way in which care is provided.

[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton]

Authorities may refuse, or cancel, registration where these, or similar, conditions of registration imposed by authorities under the 1968 Act are not satisfied. An authority may thus close a home if it is unsatisfactory. This is a power which has to be used with care.

In order to ensure that standards of care are maintained on an on-going basis at a sufficiently high level following initial registration, local authorities have powers to inspect establishments with regard to the condition and management of the establishment as well as the care provided. Guidance issued by the Scottish Office indicates that it is for authorities to determine the frequency of inspections. It recommends that two per year should be seen as the minimum for normal circumstances, and suggests that at least one inspection should be undertaken without notice.

Mr. Home Robertson: If the Minister had been in a position to follow the case as I have over the past year, he would understand that the local authority has been doing its level best to deal with the situation for a long time, but has not had proper powers. The Minister is saying that it is open to the local authority to withdraw registration. I invite him to address my point about the fact that the former trustees threatened to do without registration, and simply to put the residents on to housing benefit instead, which is a way of driving a coach and horses through the controls.

How long will it take the Scottish Charities Office? It has had information about the odd accounting practices of the former trustees for 14 months. How much longer?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I can answer those points. A number of inquiries are currently in progress. The first is being conducted by the Scottish Charities Office into the conduct of the previous trustees and administration. A full report has been prepared by an accountant on the financial issues relating to the administration, which go back a long way. That is expected to be in the hands of the Scottish Charities Office very shortly, and will leave the way open for a conclusion to the matter before very long.

The second investigation is being conducted by the police into allegations of sexual abuse. In addition, a Scottish Office working party is looking at registration procedures. That should provide a stronger registration and inspection process in due course. We are thus taking all these problems seriously, but I do not think that any additional inquiry is needed.

Mr. Home Robertson: What about housing benefit?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The accountant will cover thoroughly all the matters relating to the accounts of the administration. We would be extremely dissatisfied if he did anything less, and I have every confidence that he will do that.

Mr. Home Robertson *rose—*

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Before the hon. Gentleman intervenes again, I must tell him that we consider the problem that he has raised as very serious. I share his concern. Action has been taken. The Scottish Charities Office has intervened effectively, and will continue to do so. There are new trustees and new management. The residents have been moved to new premises. Investigations are in progress. We must learn the necessary lessons, and I will keep the hon. Gentleman in touch with what is going on.

I warmly congratulate the Church of Scotland on its action in this matter, which has been of great benefit to those directly concerned.

Mr. Home Robertson: I invite the Minister to address the second question that I put to him. It was wide open to these people to sidestep the whole registration procedure by simply opting out of the social work part of the process and claiming housing benefit. That was a threat. Will he do anything to block that loophole?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I will look into the hon. Gentleman's point and write to him.

On a slightly different point, I must tell the hon. Gentleman that a Scottish Office working party is looking thoroughly at the registration procedures. It will reach an outcome and make recommendations to the Secretary of State before long.

The point raised by the hon. Gentleman may well be covered in the accountant's report, which is expected this week along with—

Mr. Home Robertson *indicated dissent.*

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman may shake his head, but he does not know what is in the accountant's report. It has not been presented to me. It is about to be presented to the Scottish Charities Office. His point may well be covered. I will look into the matter and write to the hon. Gentleman.

This is a serious matter, and I am extremely grateful to the Church of Scotland, which has acted in a selfless and dedicated manner in the best interests of those who were looked after—perhaps that is the wrong expression—those who were in the home. That is wholly to its credit. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on raising this matter.

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at fifteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 17 January 1996

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mental Illness

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

9.34 am

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Today marks the anniversary of the introduction of Wednesday morning Adjournment debates. Everyone who has taken part in them agrees that they have been an outstanding success, enabling Members to articulate a number of topics of concern to their constituents and the wider public in a non-partisan way.

Despite what my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells), the Government Whip, may say, Wednesday morning debates have tended to be non-partisan. That may be helped by the fact that members of the press do not arrive in the House of Commons until 2.30 pm; they leave at 4 pm and then write about the short working day of Members. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is to be congratulated on this innovation and I make no apology to the House for introducing yet again the subject of the treatment of the mentally ill, about which I have spoken in a previous Wednesday morning debate.

Yesterday's papers reported widespread concern about the operation of care in the community. It is obviously difficult to talk about the subject because we hear only about the cases that fail. There are a large number of successful cases of care in the community, but my concern and that of the House and the country is that there are too many unsuccessful cases. Certainly, the views of the relatives of those affected is that sometimes the psychiatrists do not listen to the parents and relatives of those afflicted with schizophrenia as often as they might.

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): In addition to the concerns of parents and relatives are those of our constituents who live next to, opposite or in the same block of flats as people who have been released into the community. They sometimes feel that they are given insufficient back-up when there are major problems with a neighbour who perhaps ought to go back into secure care, and that their concerns are not sufficiently taken into account when they ask for action along those lines.

Mr. Marshall: I thoroughly agree with my hon. Friend. About a dozen or 15 people from a council-owned block of flats came to one of my earliest surgeries, and I wondered what on earth had gone wrong. They explained that the problem was all to do with a Mr. Campbell. I asked whether he was the caretaker and they replied, "No. He is a patient who has been released into the community." Having been released into the community, Mr. Campbell lived in a flat where he had an armchair and a stereo system. His way of life was to operate his stereo system from 8 pm to 8 am and rest for the entire day. That was fine for him, but not for those of his neighbours who had to get up at 8 am to go to work.

My hon. Friend is quite right to say that the neighbours frequently suffer. It was with great difficulty that I was able to get a psychiatrist to look again at Mr. Campbell. In far too many cases, neighbours and individuals who are divorced from the problem become victims of it.

Yesterday's papers were full of the murder of the south London schoolteacher Suzanne Steckel by her son Gilbert, who then committed suicide. Gilbert had discharged himself from the Maudsley hospital, which is a mental hospital. Two lives were lost unnecessarily because of the ease with which he was able to discharge himself.

Secondly, there was a report that 61 murders had been committed by schizophrenics, who were involved in more than 200 suicides. That represents five unnecessary deaths every week. It is not sufficient to say that the trend is downwards from 109 murders in 1979. There are still too many unnecessary killings and deaths as a result of people being released prematurely from hospital.

Yesterday, a report in *The Times* stated that the Royal College of Psychiatrists attributed suicides and homicides to three factors—a failure of communication, lack of face-to-face contact between patients and doctors, and patients not taking their medication. An article in *The Independent* yesterday by Nicholas Timmins, a widely respected journalist writing on social issues, described the lack of psychiatric hospital beds. The Royal College of Psychiatrists estimates that London has a bed occupancy rate of 120 per cent. and that Londoners can be sent into secure accommodation as far afield as in Yorkshire or Wales, 200 miles away. The article pointed out that the bed manager of Gordon hospital in London has the telephone numbers of 37 secure units, so that when he receives a request for a secure bed, he has 37 units to call, on the off-chance that he will be able to locate such a bed.

All that is bad enough, but *The Independent* this morning contained another article by Nicholas Timmins, with further worrying comments:

> "At one end of the system, approaching a quarter of Broadmoor's 450 patients could be discharged to a less secure environment if space was available . . . At the other end, ordinary acute wards are having to handle growing numbers of seriously disturbed patients because they cannot be moved up to more secure accommodation. More medium secure accommodation beds are being provided—numbers are due to rise from 700 to . . . 1,200 by December".

The Mental Health Act Commission believes that the figure should be 2,000 rather than 1,200, and says that there was an underestimate of how many beds were needed to allow for occasional relapses. The commission reported the discovery of previously undetected cases by new community teams, said that there were too few 24-hour nursed beds outside hospitals and noted the premature discharge of patients from mental hospital to free beds for even more drastic cases.

Premature discharge is one of the real issues that we must examine. Individuals are released so that others in a worse situation can take their beds. They are released before the suitable time, then are taken back into hospital. It would be much better if their treatment could run its natural course in hospital, so that patients might be released into the community with a chance of real success.

[Mr. Marshall]

As a Member of Parliament representing a London constituency, one tends to talk about the capital—but the situation that I have described is not unique to London. The Mental Health Act Commission states:

"Occupancy levels of 100 per cent. and above have been reported from areas as far apart as Devon, East Anglia and Cheshire".

I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) is in his place to represent that distinguished county. All those issues were raised in yesterday's newspapers, but earlier this year homicides were committed by Wayne Hutchinson, who was guilty of killing two individuals and wounding another three. It was commented that he had been "released by mistake". Earlier this year, Martin Murcell was gaoled for life for the murder of his stepfather and the attempted murder of his mother. In January, doctors reporting on an experimental scheme run by the Institute of Psychiatry in south London noted that 92 patients had been released, resulting in the suicides of three patients, while another killed a young baby.

Last December, Dr. Imweldo in Hampstead was attacked in his surgery when he attempted to defend another doctor, who happens to be a constituent of mine. We read about such cases in the newspapers and all have personal experience of individuals not receiving the treatment which they need and which we and their relatives can see that they need.

There is a tradition in the House to declare one's interests. My interest is as vice-president of the Jewish Association for the Mentally Ill—although I assure hon. Members that it advises me rather than relies on my advice. I pay tribute to the work of JAMI's volunteers and those of the National Schizophrenia Fellowship. Most are relatives of victims of schizophrenia. Some have lost their loved sons and daughters through suicide, but they have not become introspective and miserable. Instead, those parents and relatives decided to use their experience to help other victims of schizophrenia.

The treatment of mentally ill people in this country and every other has undergone a revolution. In the middle ages, the mentally ill were burnt as witches or kept chained in unpleasant and unsavoury surroundings, and that does not happen today. The Victorian asylums that Mr. Enoch Powell was so anxious to close were a remarkable improvement on the dismal surroundings of the past. When people sought to close asylums, they forgot that asylums were a place of refuge—that the mentally ill did much better in them than they would have done at home or in the community. Of course, the rules of the 1940s were far too restrictive—it was much too easy to have someone committed to a mental hospital. The Mental Health Acts of 1959 and 1983 went from one extreme to another. Admission to a mental hospital is now seen as the last resort. The power to section remains, but it is used far too reluctantly.

There has been a failure by psychiatrists to acknowledge the problems of care in the community, under which it has been assumed that persons so mentally ill as to require treatment were sufficiently mentally acute to acknowledge the need for that treatment. Drugs are a powerful weapon in dealing with schizophrenia, but a most unpleasant weapon. We all remember being given a nasty dose of medicine as children and being told by our mothers, "The nasty medicine is the most effective." I once persuaded my mother to try the medicine, and with the sort of logic that would not befit a politician I said, "You've taken the medicine, so I do not need to take it." She replied, "Yes, you do. The nasty medicine will make you better."

One may say to a schizophrenic, "You are sufficiently cured to enter the community, but not to avoid the need to take nasty medicine." Some patients may willingly accept the first piece of advice, but be reluctant to accept the second. The result is that such patients become a danger to themselves and to other people. A policy born of compassion was misguided in part because it failed to recognise that asylums were a haven for troubled souls and that some individuals needed treatment in institutions rather than in the community. Others will need periods of treatment in hospital, to enable them to return to the community.

Three areas require development. There should be a moratorium on patients, or at least we should reverse the policy of reducing the number of beds for the mentally ill. The dramatic decline from 145,000 beds in 1961 to fewer than 45,000 today has been too drastic.

The remarks of Dr. Searle were quoted in *The Independent* on 26 September. He said that he had left Hackney

"because it was so appallingly bad".

He continued:

"You had to throw out people who were very mad in order to admit people who were very, very mad. They are still doing that, having to discharge people who down here"—

Dr. Searle now lives in Bournemouth—

"I would be admitting."

There was an article in *The Independent* on 15 June last year, which stated:

"Hackney operates at 140 per cent. capacity instead of the 80 per cent. recommended to allow for emergency admissions. Admissions are restricted to psychotic patients threatening suicide, violence or facing imminent breakdown. Often, to make room for them, others are discharged before they are ready. Many seriously mentally ill patients are shunted in and out as their condition slightly improves with hospital care and then deteriorates without it."

The reduction in the number of beds has been far too drastic. I am concerned about what will happen to patients at Napsbury when the closure takes place. I would prefer Napsbury not to close. It is an issue of great concern in north London. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to explain how many beds will be provided elsewhere if and when Napsbury closes.

We need a change in the philosophy of psychiatrists. I accept that psychiatry is not an exact science. If someone is suffering from pneumonia, the doctors know what to do. Psychiatrists, however, do not always know what to do when dealing with psychiatric problems. It is too easy to leave mental hospitals and it is too difficult for some people to enter them.

Mrs. X, as I shall call her, is one of my constituents. She has written to many Members claiming that she is being pursued by Mossad, by the Japanese, by MI5 and by various other organisations. The lady's quality of life is quite impossible. I once went to see her. She met me outside the block of flats in which she lives. She said, "We must speak very softly because we are going to be overheard." When I went inside I asked her, "Have you got a doctor?" Her immediate reaction was, "I don't need

a psychiatrist." I had referred to a doctor, not a psychiatrist. It was clear that the lady's quality of life was appalling.

I went to a meeting in honour of former Prime Minister Rabin. Mrs. X was standing outside with a poster that went from her head down past her knees. Her quality of life is such that she feels persecuted. She is a victim living in the community who would be much better treated somewhere else.

I have another constituent who became convinced that my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) was about to kill her. We had 19 telephone calls on our answering machine one weekend. She kept on saying, "It is Roddy Boyson. He is coming to get me." I could not think of anyone less likely than my right hon. Friend to attack a lady living in west Hendon. I could not believe that my right hon. Friend was going to live on the west Hendon council estate so as to attack this poor lady. Her quality of life was very poor. I cannot believe that she benefited from being in the community. She would have been very much better if she had been cared for elsewhere.

There is talk about civil rights, and I believe that everyone has civil rights. The parents of patients have rights. They would much prefer to see those patients in hospital rather than in the community. Potential victims have civil rights. The right to life is the greatest right of all. We must weigh the rights of neighbours, patients and individuals when considering whether people should be in hospital or in the community.

When we adopted the policy of care in the community, I believe that the Treasury was seduced by the capital that it could see flowing into its coffers. It did not realise that proper care in the community would be very expensive, involving purpose-built homes, adequate supervision and the training of many staff. The Royal College of Nursing believes that we need to double the number of community psychiatric nurses if care in the community is to work.

For far too many, care in the community has been a poor-quality service. I shall always remember my first meeting with members of the NSF. I turned to one lady and asked, "What is your problem?" She replied, "It is my daughter." I asked, "Where is your daughter?" She said, "I don't know. My daughter will be sleeping on a park bench somewhere in London tonight." That girl and her family were cheated by care in the community. *The Economist* was surely right when it commented that care in the community

"has turned out to mean neglect on a street corner."

That has been the outcome for some. The irony is that some of those who are released into the community for care in the community end up committing crimes and find themselves in a different institution, a prison rather than a hospital.

I welcome the suggestion in *The Daily Telegraph* of 28 December that the Government will produce a charter for the mentally ill that will provide for easier access to hospital treatment and for consultation with carers and relatives before patients are released into the community. One of the great failings of the care in the community policy is that we have not listened to parents, relatives and carers. All too often, their wishes and knowledge have been ignored. They know the patients best. They should be able to tell psychiatrists more than perhaps psychiatrists sometimes want to hear.

It is not sufficient to produce a charter. It is necessary to produce more beds for the mentally ill. The current supply of beds is an incentive for premature discharge into the community. It underlines the reluctance of some members of the psychiatric profession to keep patients in hospital.

However, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has great experience because he was the Minister with responsibility for the mentally ill. I believe that he recognises the problems. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary should as well because he is a former Secretary of State for Health. But if we fail to recognise the need for improving the quality of care in the community and the need for more beds for the mentally ill, we shall be failing not only the mentally ill but their relatives, their friends, their neighbours and society at large.

9.57 am

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I commend the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) for introducing the debate and once again obtaining time to discuss a serious issue. He has previously been successful in doing exactly that. I genuinely respect his strength of feeling about the problems that have arisen in many respects although I differ to some extent with the solutions that he has put forward. On his own admission, he has concentrated primarily on failures rather than successes. He accepted at the beginning of the speech that there have been successes. It is important to recognise that the successes do not hit the headlines. They are not reported widely in news bulletins and accordingly do not come to the attention of Members. That should be borne in mind. Indeed, it should underpin our thoughts this morning.

I have probably been involved in most, if not all, of the debates on community care since the introduction of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, and on the White Paper that preceded it. I have listened with interest to the opinions of Conservative Members. There is the irony that there is probably more support for the principle behind the Government's policy on the Opposition Benches than on the Conservative Benches. There is a scarcely concealed romantic vision—it underpinned the speech of the hon. Member for Hendon, South—of the past in psychiatry, where there were no problems on the streets and the lunatic asylums were full. I do not share that romantic notion because, as the hon. Gentleman is aware, I spent much of my working life before becoming a Member of Parliament discharging from psychiatric institutions—the former lunatic asylums—people who had been wrongly incarcerated, in many instances before I was born.

I feel strongly that although it is nice to go back to that romantic, idealistic past, we should not forget what happened to vast numbers of people in our society who were incarcerated in a way that nobody should defend. Nobody should want to go back to that. I do not suggest that the hon. Gentleman wants to go back to that, but I remind him that I was involved in discharging people from hospital who were incarcerated as moral defectives. They were not in any way mad or ill. They were simply people who had a different way of life from the majority of people at that time. All were women. I had never met a male moral defective until I came to this place. "Back to basics" exposed one or two, but I shall not go into detail on that.

[Mr. David Hinchliffe]

I respect the fact that the Minister believes in the policy. I have worked closely with him over a number of years, so I exempt him from my accusation. The difficulty that the Government have is that they believe in institutional incarceration, whether in psychiatry or the penal system, but they are not prepared to pay for it. That difficulty has caused many of the problems that we now have in community care. Community care is nothing new. In a sense, what is new is institutional provision. If one goes back in history, one will see that community care was the norm. People lived in the community. There was the village idiot. Such people were accepted more than they are nowadays.

The institution was, for a variety of reasons, invented. Enoch Powell, who was the Minister responsible for the hospital plan in 1962, was advised that there had been changes in the drug regimes and that we could treat people in the community. There was vast evidence—from Goffman and others—of the effects of institutionalisation, but the key issue that persuaded Enoch Powell, who was a monetarist before Lady Thatcher, was that it was far cheaper to keep people in the community. What concerns me, and in a sense the hon. Gentleman referred to this, was that the Treasury attraction to the policy in the 1980s, and the rapid—perhaps too rapid—move towards closing and disposing of establishments and moving patients into the community, was driven primarily by monetarist policies aimed at realising the assets of the institutions rather than looking at the principles behind community care and the human rights that we would all agree should be accorded to people with mental health problems.

I was a member of a health authority when the process was going ahead and I recall the pressures that the authority in Wakefield was placed under to get rid of its psychiatric beds. I remember vividly one meeting at which we had a letter from the Yorkshire regional health authority, expressing concern that the people in Stanley Royd hospital in Wakefield were not dying as quickly as expected and that the number of beds was therefore not being reduced. Concern was expressed to the health authority about the impact of the policy.

We should look at what happened in the 1980s, because that is the key to unravelling some of the problems that we now have. One of the most insidious elements of what was happening with the care in the community programme in the 1980s was the introduction of performance-related pay for senior health officials on the basis of achieving bed reductions, ward closures and the closure of hospitals. They were personally paid bonuses—not to ensure that people were properly rehabilitated in the community, but to achieve the disposal of psychiatric facilities. That is why we have the problems now. There was a rapid, ill-thought-out move to care in the community—care which, frankly, did not and in many respects still does not exist.

Perhaps the hon. Gentleman agrees with many of the points that I am making. We are now picking up the pieces as a result of that ill-thought-out, Treasury-driven policy in many of the tragedies that we face. I in no way underestimate the difficulties facing many people as a result of some of the tragedies. Like the Minister, I have met people who have been directly affected. Jane Zito is an extremely courageous woman for whom I have the greatest respect. After suffering the most appalling personal tragedy, she has gone out and fought. As she knows, I do not always agree with what she says, but I admire her courage, and the courage of others who came recently to the House of Commons when the supervised discharge order was being debated, to lobby Members of Parliament about their concerns. I appreciate their concerns and their courage in attempting to say to Members of Parliament, "Do something so that others do not have to face similar tragedies."

The real weakness of Government policy is that community care seems to be in a narrow policy box, divorced from a range of wider issues that impact on the lives of people in the community who face various mental health problems. We had an example of that this week. I understand that the Government are to slash 3,000 prison officers from the Prison Service. In my constituency, I have two prisons, one of which is a top security prison, and I know for a fact that a significant number of people in both those prisons suffer from mental illness. In slashing the number of prison officers and addressing the prison budgets, there has been no evaluation of the impact that that will have on the mentally ill. There has been no consideration of the knock-on effects that that will have or of the way in which the prison system is dealing—in my view, completely wrongly—with many people who should be helped by other means within society. The Government's housing policies have a clear impact on the ability of people from psychiatric hospitals to obtain and respond to care in the community.

What about employment prospects? The mass unemployment policy impacts on the most vulnerable. Clearly, people who want to be rehabilitated need employment opportunities, which are often denied them due to the policy of mass unemployment.

The key area that I wish to emphasise is the wider organisational aspects of community care. We have never really addressed the way in which, in terms of its framework, the current organisation of community care is a shambles. What we have as an organisational framework to assist people in the community is simply not working. I felt that that was so when the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 went through Parliament. I am on record as saying that I felt that we were not offering a way forward, although I did not differ with the Government on moving to assessments by the local authority and on community care planning. Everybody knows that the central motive for the community care changes was Treasury driven—the desire to reduce the social security budget. That was the real reason why we moved to the current system.

I found it amazing that on the one hand the Government introduced community planning within local authorities, and on the other introduced an internal market in health. The two simply do not square up. When there has been an inquiry into what has gone wrong when a person has come out of hospital and caused problems, and when sometimes there have been fatalities, the finger often points at the organisational structure of what is on offer to such people when they are being rehabilitated into the community. I appeal to the Minister to look at the division between local authorities and the NHS, because so long as there is a split responsibility on issues such as community care and continuing care there will be problems. There will be disputes and people will blame one another. That is at the heart of our present organisational difficulties.

Government policy has become reactive. It changes from day to day in response to various tragedies. As the Minister knows, I understood his dilemma in relation to supervised discharge orders, but the Government have ignored representations from virtually everyone who will have to administer the new arrangements. It has been pointed out that those arrangements are unworkable, and do not deal with the real problems of care in the community.

No alternatives to hospital provision have been devised, although hospital provision has been run down. I agree with the hon. Member for Hendon, South that we need to consider the lack of beds—I hope that he was referring to acute rather than long-stay beds when he spoke of a moratorium—but we should not return to an agenda that involves putting more and more people in asylums. We should, for instance, consider asylum in the community. We do not have to put people in Victorian buildings, away from society. The real challenge of community care is rehabilitation. I have seen good examples of asylum in the community—drop-in and day centres where people feel safe—but, sadly, they are few and far between.

Today's debate is about care in the community. We have reduced the opportunity of vast numbers of people to receive care in hospitals: rightly or wrongly—rightly, in my view—we have tried to move away from the old system. For many people, however, care in the community is not available. The Government should look forward, rather than back to a "golden age" of asylums that, in fact, never existed.

10.11 am

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on obtaining yet another Adjournment debate. I am pleased to be able to speak on this important subject.

We have heard two well-informed speeches, both of which have contributed to a better understanding of the problems relating to mental health. I agreed with every word uttered by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South, and with the overwhelming majority of what was said by the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe). He and I served for some years on the Social Services and, subsequently, the Health Select Committee, and this subject was frequently discussed in both Committees. The Social Services Select Committee produced excellent reports on mental illness and mental handicap.

No one doubts my hon. Friend the Minister's commitment to care in the community. Hon. Members on both sides of the House consider him humane, sensitive and caring, and his reputation justifies that. But—here I agree entirely with the hon. Member for Wakefield—there has been a change in policy which dates back to the actions of Enoch Powell in the 1960s. As the Select Committee pointed out many times in its reports, the policy of decanting people from long-stay institutions to care in the community was initially Treasury driven: it was thought that care in the community was a cheaper option.

In fact, as anyone who has anything to do with mental illness or handicap will know, care in the community is not cheaper but more expensive, although I agree that it is more humane. I share the view of hon. Members on both sides of the House that long-stay institutions should become a thing of the past, but—and here I disagree with the hon. Member for Wakefield—I believe that a number of long-stay beds in asylums are still needed. Hospitals can provide the necessary care for the acutely mentally ill, who may suffer from drug or alcohol problems.

I support the principle of care in the community, but I believe that we have moved too fast. The closure of institutions is often driven by a desire to realise capital gains from the sites involved. Many long-stay hospitals are located in areas where land values are very high, and those managing the health service for the Government are often motivated by performance-related pay. I think it unfortunate that we introduced performance-related pay in a caring service. Hospitals were closed before adequate facilities were available in the community, including staff. In seeking to proceed with a desirable policy, we have thrown the baby out with the bath water.

My hon. Friend the Minister is well aware of my involvement in these issues, and my support for Parkside, a long-stay mental hospital in Macclesfield. He knows of the battle that I have fought, along with many local people whose relations have suffered from mental illness. We have campaigned to save the hospital; sadly, we have failed—which may demonstrate the lack of power possessed by Members of Parliament. Although for some years I have been a member of the party that is in government, propositions that I consider wise—fully supported by those most closely involved—have been ignored by those who manage the health service on behalf of the Department of Health and, indeed, on behalf of the people.

At Question Time yesterday, I raised two constituency cases. I make no apology for raising them again today. Two people died. One was a young girl called Emma Larkins, who burnt herself to death in her flat in Victoria Park in Macclesfield. She came from a family that was sadly split: her parents divorced when she was three years old. I do not think that I am being disrespectful or unfair to Emma or her family when I say that her behaviour had caused the authorities serious problems for many years. Much of that behaviour was generated by drugs and, perhaps, alcohol.

Emma's father has been in touch with the east Cheshire coroner, sending him his account of his daughter's life and the events leading to her death in November. He points his finger at social services. I agree with the hon. Member for Wakefield, who speaks with considerable knowledge on these matters, that there is a divide between the health service and social services. In the main, that is the gap that has to be closed. More thought has to be given by the professionals and by the Department to how to close that gap which allows tragedies such as that of Emma Larkins to take place.

Mr. Larkins says that social services are responsible and that he is concerned not just for his daughter who is now dead but for all young people like Emma. The social services have said that they do not want to comment on Emma's death until after the official inquest. Emma's mother is more specific. She feels that the health service, and Parkside hospital in particular, is responsible because her daughter went to Parkside hospital on the day of her death seeking help and, basically, seeking support—recognition of her problems. Sadly, the help that she required was not forthcoming. As a result, she returned to her flat and burned herself to death. Moreover, she could have caused the deaths of many other people if the fire had not been caught early before it spread to other apartments in the Victoria Park flats complex.

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As I have said, there is a gap. Why is it that social services, which had been involved with Emma for many years, and the health service, which is responsible for dealing with people who have mental and behavioural problems and who engage in alcohol and drug abuse, were not able more closely to monitor this young person and give her the support and back-up that she needed to prevent her from taking this tragic action? I want to see that gap filled.

Yesterday I also referred to another case in my constituency, that of Lynn Fox who was not such a young woman as Emma Larkins but had created considerable problems for the community for a long time. She had been before the courts and had been taken in by the police, and had received treatment from East Cheshire NHS trust for her condition. She caused her neighbours immense aggravation, to such an extent that one of them, because of the pressure under which he was living, the aggravation that she had caused and the tension that had built up, stabbed her to death. The young man in question, Jason, is now in Walton gaol serving a sentence of just over three years. Why was this allowed to happen?

In recent weeks I have corresponded with Jason Lucas's wife, Deborah, who has provided me with some interesting material. In her latest letter she states:

"I am in possession of all the evidence collated for Jason's trial. This includes a copy of a statement by a Consultant Psychiatrist at Parkside hospital. In his statement he says that Lynn was frequently admitted to hospital, via A and E, after claiming to have taken an overdose. Later she would sometimes admit this was a lie, and declare that she had only said it to get help. The statement also contains the following comments:—

'In my opinion Fox was a chronic alcoholic who could not give up alcohol, she was also addicted to tranquillisers and she used to mix both and overdose on them.

When she was drinking she became abusive and violent and tended to become psychotic.'"

I accept that this is a borderline case. It might be the responsibility of social services or the health service because of that psychotic condition which, I believe, is a mental illness. As a result of Lynn's activities over a protracted period of time, one of her neighbours—the young man whom I have mentioned, who perhaps suffered a bit too much from an aggressive personality—took the action that I have described. I understand that he had received some treatment. None the less, he and his neighbours were driven to hate this woman and in the end he was driven to kill her.

In justification of what I have said about what that man did—that he was driven to do it—I shall relate some comments by the neighbours who shared his problems. One of them said:

"I am not surprised that someone has been driven to do something about the problem."

Another said:

"I'm honestly surprised that she has not been assaulted by someone before. I have certainly felt like hitting her myself, as she has really wound me up on occasions."

Another neighbour said:

"I felt relieved when the police told me she was dead. I feel no sorrow for her at all."

A fourth neighbour said:

"Fox upset and depressed us so much that I thought of doing her harm myself. I am not surprised at all that someone has done her harm. I've been expecting it for some time now."

I was in touch with the authorities about the behaviour of Lynn Fox over a period of time and nothing was done. I am sure that the House shares my concern about the fact that a young man now finds himself in prison because he was driven to take action, although the responsibility for dealing with this case lay with the health service and the social services.

What can be done to fill the gap and prevent further tragic cases such as the two that I have mentioned? I repeat that I have total confidence in the Minister's commitment and humanity. I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South that care in the community is a humane and civilised way of dealing with those who suffer from mental illness. However, we must not go over the top. Long-stay beds are still needed and we need to be able to bring into hospital for treatment those who are clearly suffering from mental illnesses but who, because of their condition, are not prepared to take the decision to go for treatment. My hon. Friend highlighted that point in a number of the cases that he drew to the attention of the House.

I seek to be constructive in these matters. Certainly in respect of the Lynn Fox case I am in touch not only with social services in Cheshire but with East Cheshire NHS trust. I have had 100 per cent. co-operation from the chairman of that trust, Mr. Peter Hayes, who is held in high regard, is committed to the health service and is deeply concerned about matters relating to mental illness. He has given me 100 per cent. support in this case. I am also in touch with Councillor Simon Cussons, chairman of South Cheshire health authority, with the probation service, social services and the police. I am in touch with the Home Office. When I have received replies to all the representations, particularly my latter ones to the probation service and the Home Office, Peter Hayes and I propose to convene a meeting in Macclesfield of all the authorities that I have named to see whether we can prevent such a case recurring. I am seeking to be constructive and, like the hon. Member for Wakefield, to bring the health service and social services closer together so that we do not have this divided responsibility, whereby a gap can result in tragic deaths, with all the problems that go with that.

By securing this debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South has done a great service in relation to mental illness. I agree with every word that he said. His concern is genuine, as is mine. The hon. Member for Wakefield is very informed on these matters. Although I disagree with him on a number of issues, overall I have complete confidence in what he is seeking to achieve. We are not far apart—we both want care in the community to work, but problems still exist and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will assure us that the gaps and problems will be dealt with.

10.30 am

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Time is short and, if the Minister is to be allowed sufficient time to reply—I certainly want that—I must confine myself to one or two short remarks.

It is a coincidence that this debate is taking place in the same week as the confidential inquiry report into homicides and suicides was published, and that the junior Health Minister who set up that inquiry in 1991 is now Secretary of State for Health. In a press release issued at that time, he said:

"we must insist that if a discharged patient is involved in homicide or similar incidents, every detail of the history of that patient's management is fully examined and the lessons learnt. One such incident is too many. But if a repeat incident occurs because the lessons of the first have not been learnt, we are all culpable."

It is sad that, since that time, a number of well-publicised incidents have taken place. Usually, the ones that have received the most publicity have involved the killing of people who were unrelated to a mentally ill person. We have had reports on the Christopher Clunis case and several others, some of which have been mentioned this morning. Can the Minister say, hand on heart, that all the lessons of those reports have been learnt?

The Ritchie report into the Christopher Clunis case said that care in the community for that person was a

"catalogue of failure and missed opportunity".

Other reports have highlighted the lack of co-ordination, which has been mentioned this morning, between the various agencies, the health service and social services.

Those are the cases that have received publicity. The confidential inquiry report has shown that, although there have been 39 homicides, most of them have involved members of the mentally ill person's family and that a far higher number of mentally ill people have committed suicide. It is estimated that one in 10 schizophrenics commit suicide.

I congratulate the previous Secretary of State for Health on her intention to give mental health a higher priority and on "The Health of the Nation" target to reduce suicides among mentally ill people by 33 per cent. Sadly, that target has not been met, and we must ask ourselves why. No doubt the Minister will tell us about the increased resources for mental health services. Figures show that more has been spent, but, as a proportion of the total amount spent on health, the mental health service budget has been declining in importance.

I am sure that no hon. Member present, knowing the experiences that they have had, can say that this country has ever had a first-class mental health service. My father suffered from schizophrenia. In the 1950s and 1960s, I had personal experience of the failures of mental health care. He attempted to take his life and, on one occasion, threatened to murder me. I do not think that that was a serious threat—most mentally ill people are not a danger to the community—but, traditionally, this country has failed mentally ill people. We must give mental health a higher priority.

That is not happening in my constituency in south Birmingham. The figures show a dramatic reduction in the number of psychiatric beds—about 150 since 1985—and only about 85 community psychiatric nurses are in post. I have seen people working in the one mental health centre in the community that we have and have witnessed the stress that they are under. All too often, the service shuts at night and at the weekend. We need 24-hour community services and mental health centres.

The promises that we in south Birmingham were given have not materialised. Mental health centres were promised, but have not been opened, and staff have not been appointed. As a result, all too often, flagrantly mentally ill people receive treatment, but people who, in Marjorie Wallace's words, are silently suffering, are ignored and people, relatives and neighbours who silently, and not so silently, suffer with them are ignored as well.

We must do much more. The concept of community care is supported, but we must have increased resources—it is not enough to say that the resources are sufficient. Last year, in south Birmingham, the mental health service budget was cut by £500,000. This year, it faces a 3 per cent. cut because of so-called efficiency savings. There is no increase in the budget and no possibility that the community services that were promised when Rubery hospital was closed will be provided.

I ask the Minister urgently to consider the position. It is not just a matter of resources, but I note that the confidential inquiry recommends that higher resources should be provided for people who are seriously mentally ill. That is true, but not if there is a shift from other services for people who, as I have said, suffer in silence.

10.36 am

Mr. Alan Milburn (Darlington): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on securing the debate and pay tribute to all the speeches that hon. Members on both sides of House have made. We have had an informed debate about an extremely important topic.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) said, this is a timely debate, coming hard on the heels of the confidential inquiry report, which highlighted the tragic toll of homicides and suicides involving people with severe mental illness. The hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) showed how that death toll is tragically continuing. It is unusual for a month to go by without a further newspaper report highlighting some of the fault lines in the mental health services provision system.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) said, however, all the tragedies tend to obscure many of the successes. It is right to have a sense of perspective. In responding to the confidential inquiry, the Minister has been quick to point out, for example, that the overwhelming majority of people who suffer from mental illness are not a threat, either to themselves or to others. Even people with schizophrenia are more likely to be withdrawn and quiet. If they do harm at all, they are more likely to harm themselves than anyone else.

It is right to strike a balance in these debates and to emphasise that mental illness is not a single problem: it covers a multitude of problems and a multitude of people, but the switch over recent years to care in the community has brought public attention to the plight of mentally ill people. I welcome the care in the community approach because it recognises that most mentally ill people prefer life outside hospital and prosper as a consequence. No one wants a return to the old, large, remote, anonymous asylums, where sometimes brutal care was hidden from public gaze. Care in the community is both more humane and more effective, but the tragedy is that recent failures have dented public faith in the policy to such an extent that I now believe that there is almost a crisis of confidence.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Selly Oak said, yesterday's publication of the confidential inquiry is but the latest in a long catalogue of reports that have highlighted the inadequacies in current health care provision and, indeed, policy. Christopher Clunis and Jonathan Zito may well have become household names, but many others have fallen victim to the failures in the current approach to

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mental health policy. Let us not forget that yesterday's report analysed 240 suicides and 39 homicides. The battle to overcome the fear of, and ignorance about, mental illness has been badly compromised by those incidents. Whether the number of homicides and suicides is rising is not the question—what is worrying is the extent of public concern about those incidents. Too often, in too many parts of the country, that concern has slipped into fear.

There is now a danger that the care in the community approach, which the Opposition support, will cease to command public support unless urgent action—the need for which was highlighted in yesterday's report—is taken. The hon. Member for Hendon, South referred to a failure to ensure that patients complied with treatment. There have been pleas this morning for more powers to be made available over those who suffer from mental illness. However, by and large, my view is that there are sufficient powers on the statute book. The problem is a lack of implementation.

Hon. Members have highlighted three main problems. The first is a failure of co-ordination between the relevant agencies involved. The second—it was dramatically highlighted in yesterday's report—is that the staff who work with the mentally ill are often overworked and overstressed. The third is that, all too often, appropriate accommodation, whether in the community or in hospital, is not available. The confidential inquiry loudly and clearly referred to the number of overcrowded wards and the lack of appropriate hospital and community facilities. That lack of support is compromising the implementation of care in the community.

The Government have been warned time after time that there is a serious problem. This latest report comes hard on the heels of many others. The mental health policy, as implemented over recent years, has given us the worst of all possible worlds—too few beds in hospitals, inadequate facilities in the community and a shortage of specialist staff in both.

The hon. Member for Hendon, South referred to the dramatic decline in acute provision in our hospitals. The closure rate over recent years has not been accompanied by a similar dampening in demand for acute services. When the Mental Health Act Commission reported last November, it highlighted average occupancy rates of 130 per cent. in some inner-city hospitals—and not just in London. There is a temptation to think of it as a purely London problem, but it is not. The report also referred to occupancy rates in excess of 100 per cent. in Devon, Cheshire and East Anglia. It is a nationwide problem.

It is all too common for psychiatrists to have to spend hours on the telephone desperately trying to find an acute bed for someone who is severely mentally ill. Quite simply, there are not enough appropriate beds available for patients when they need them. There are not enough facilities in the community. The Audit Commission, in its recent report "Finding a Place", argued that comprehensive mental health care facilities in the community had been slow to develop. As a consequence, in too many parts of the country the cart has been put before the horse. There was a rundown in acute provision before the introduction of appropriate community facilities. There must be a balance in provision to deal with the serious concerns that have been highlighted both in today's debate and in yesterday's report.

There is need for emergency action to deal with the shortfall in provision and the issues of public confidence that have been raised. I have four brief suggestions. First, there should be a moratorium on further acute bed closures pending the development of an appropriate community infrastructure. Secondly, there should be immediate implementation of the care programme approach in all parts of the country. There has been yet another delay in implementation—with the latest deadline now being the end of March—yet the programme was due to be implemented in April 1991. Thirdly, there must be urgent action to deal with the problem of staff shortages, which is compromising patient care. Fourthly, over time, there should be changes to the mental health funding allocation formula so that cash ends up going where it is most needed. We all know that the inner cities experience a particular problem. Without urgent action, I fear that, before too long, the House will again be debating the same issues, but also a new round of tragedies involving mentally ill people.

10.46 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis): I echo what the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) said about the quality of speeches from both sides of the House, including those from the hon. Members for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) and for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) and from my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). In particular, I commend the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), who initiated this debate. As usual, he made a robust but thoughtful contribution. I always welcome his views on these matters.

I echo the points made about the need for a balance. We have a great national health service, which has made giant strides in mental health care. I pay tribute to all those working in health and social services, who have achieved so much for mentally ill people. They have transformed the approach to mental health.

Hon. Members were right to point to shortcomings and to the tragedies that occasionally occur. I agree that we need to continue looking for improvements while implementing the right policies. As my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield said, we need to close the gap.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South referred to the closure of Napsbury hospital. The decision was made some time ago and we are currently considering the consequences. As he knows, our policy is that no psychiatric hospital should close unless there are adequate replacement services. I understand that the chairman of Barnet health authority has given an undertaking that Napsbury will not close until replacement services based in Barnet are ready. Following the debate, I shall write to the chairman of that authority asking for evidence to satisfy me that that is indeed the case.

My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield made balanced and constructive points about the Lynn Fox case. I welcome what he is doing in bringing the agencies together. If, having done that, he would like to come to see me and tell me about what he has discovered, perhaps bringing the trust chairman with him, I would certainly welcome his visit.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South mentioned people who do not seem to have homes, which has been a problem in London. That is why we launched

our initiative for homeless and mentally ill people. Indeed, immediately following the debate, I shall be going straight to Tower Hamlets to open another stage of that initiative: some move-on accommodation run by the Look Ahead housing association.

Five outreach teams are in place. They cover different parts of London, especially inner London. All 10 hostels that we promised are open. The last one opened in October. They provide 148 bed spaces. We are making progress with the move-on accommodation, to which I have just referred. We have an agreement with the Housing Corporation not only for the 150 supported places that it initially promised us, but for 181 places. Five schemes offering a total of 36 places were open by the end of last year and all the places should be available by the end of the financial year 1996-97. A valuation of that scheme has been generally favourable and I shall be looking to build on that scheme in future.

Reports often refer to the issue of beds. We know that there is a fairly constant provision of 80,000 beds and about 20,000 acute beds. However, important factors are the mix of available beds, where they are, whether they are effectively and efficiently managed and whether the right people are in the right beds. All those factors have come up in this debate and we shall continue to consider them.

We asked the mental health task force to consider the provision of beds, especially in London. I certainly noted the points made in the report by the Royal College of Psychiatrists. It drew up plans with all the inner-London authorities, which have in turn drawn up their own action plans. I hope that they will prove effective. I am not complacent about London. I am very conscious of the need for community work to be supported by the provision of beds.

Indeed, on one occasion, while meeting representatives of an authority, I heard talk of the ability to close beds once the community facilities were up and running. I said that that was not the case and that the authority would need beds to ensure the success, efficient running and well-being of patients in community service. That is very much the message that I bring to the House and to our mental health service.

Mention has been made of the high-security service. The range of Reed reports on that area of care has exercised our minds. From April, a new structure of three new special health authorities to run three special hospitals supported by new commissioning structures and boards will be introduced. Our purpose is to integrate more closely those hospitals with mainstream mental health services, which—I hope—will prove effective.

The hon. Member for Wakefield mentioned people who are in prison but perhaps should not be, and the need for mental health support. That support is sometimes provided in prisons and sometimes provided by transferring prisoners to mental health hospitals—often secure hospitals, for obvious reasons. That support has been a tremendous success. We are not often given credit for the way in which, since 1990, we have enabled more than 2,500 patients to move from prison to hospital. In 1994 alone, 784 people were transferred and found places in the health service under the provisions of the Mental Health Act 1983. That was more than double the number of transfers in 1990.

The facts that we have been discussing illustrate the scale of the issue before us. We know that one in four of us is estimated to suffer from mental illness at some point in our lives. We know that mental illness is three times more common than cancer and as common as heart disease, and that few of us will pass through life without being touched by it—whether personally or, as the hon. Member for Selly Oak rather movingly told us, through the suffering of a friend or family member.

The cost of mental illness to society is heavy—not only in terms of human misery but economically. In 1991, for example, some 91 million working days were lost to mental illness even without taking into account days lost by carers who were looking after somebody who was mentally ill. A degree of stigma is still attached to the topic. That is damaging because it makes life more difficult and distressing for mentally ill people and prevents others from seeking help when they need it. Removing stigma is part of our policy and must be part of the onus placed on all of us.

In Health questions yesterday, I referred to Professor Norman Sartorius, the president of the World Psychiatric Association and the former head of the mental health division of the World Health Organisation. Overnight, we have received a further message from him stating:

"England has taken the lead in work to prevent mental illness and to tackle stigma."

Although that is good news—I welcome the tribute—we must strive ever more. We sponsor surveys of public attitudes, we have produced leaflets which discuss in jargon-free terms the policies in different areas, and of course we support World Mental Health Day, which focuses especially on young people.

The debate has concentrated on the sort of support needed to avoid problems. That is why one of the keys to successful policy is the care programme approach, which aims to ensure that care is provided on the basis of properly assessed individual need, with a coherent care plan and a facility for regular review. The vast majority of health authorities have already implemented it. Perhaps, as the hon. Member for Darlington said, some progress is still to be made. On the whole, that relates to those who are not severely mentally ill, in ensuring that such care is available for everybody.

It is our firmly expressed policy that hospitals should not close unless and until alternative provision is available. Indeed, many are not closing but being converted to more modern and appropriate facilities. We must have a range of facilities, including residential care, varying degrees of support, hospital facilities, crisis beds and medium-term hospital beds. The whole concept of asylum is essential as part of the package of measures to help people who are mentally ill. Some people will have to spend long periods of time in 24-hour nursed beds—in some cases the whole of their lives—and we should not duck that responsibility.

We also attach great importance to the development of primary care in mental health. We are continuing to part-fund a senior GP fellow who takes national leads in the education of GPs in that area. A senior primary care nurse facilitator does likewise. Our work on defeating depression is also part of that development.

I make no apologies for reminding the House of our programme to increase the number of medium-secure psychiatric beds. They are essential. Despite the fact that a gap in provision was identified by the Glancy committee in 1974, there was not one such bed by 1979. The Government have responded to that, and by the end

[Mr. John Bowis]

of this year, there will be more than 1,200 such beds through our £47 million investment. With an additional 300 regional beds, and the provision of about 500 beds in the independent sector, the figure just about totals the 2,000 beds to which my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield referred.

Mental health services are at the top of our agenda. I am grateful that hon. Members of all parties recognise the priority and emphasis given to that area of our health service by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. That is why, last August, we wrote to health authorities requiring them to let us have details of their plans for service development. The results of that exercise are now being analysed and we hope to make an announcement on the conclusions shortly. I shall be surprised if those conclusions do not show that there are widespread plans for increased investment in mental health services. That underlines our commitment to the mental health service. It is one of the five key areas in "The Health of the Nation" strategy and one of the six medium-term priorities for the 1996-97 priorities and planning guidance for the NHS.

Mentally ill people, like everyone else who receives care, have a right to expect standards of care, and that is why we shall launch for consultation our draft booklet in the patients charter series specifically for users of mental health services. We can improve the system and we can improve the service. We shall do so if we all work together for the benefit of patients.

Severe Weather (Scotland)

11 am

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I am very grateful for the opportunity to debate the effects of the extreme weather conditions which prevailed over Christmas and the new year. The presence of so many Back-Bench Members in the Chamber indicates that the matter touched just about every constituency in Scotland.

Today, I shall focus attention on the response of the Scottish Office to a national emergency which demanded a nationally co-ordinated response. I think that the Opposition are united in the view that the performance of Scottish Office Ministers was inept and inadequate. That is also a common view in Scotland.

In recent years, the Scottish Office has not been a byword for speedy action and transparent accountability. That is, perhaps, a criticism that the House would expect from me. However, the whole of Scotland will wonder today why this debate on this subject is proving of so little importance to the Secretary of State for Scotland that he cannot drag himself to the Dispatch Box to consider the matter or to defend his record and the record of his ministerial team. I understand that all the other political leaders of Scotland seek to catch your eye in this debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We are entitled to hear a reply by the Secretary of State for Scotland. Instead, he prefers to leave his junior Minister, the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch), yet again, to carry the can for the crisis.

Clearly, we would not find on the desk of the Secretary of State the same plaque that was on Harry Truman's. For the Secretary of State, the buck clearly stops elsewhere. After hibernating during the freeze, he is now hiding from the debate. He might well hide because it is his Department that failed the people of Scotland in the recent crisis. He should, therefore, be here to answer personally for his Department's inadequacy. After all, the crisis in Scotland was his first major challenge as Secretary of State for Scotland. For the first time in the tenure of his post, there was an opportunity to show his mettle and to direct the resources available to him to do some good. At the end of 1995, the Secretary of State for Scotland was weighed in the balance and found wanting.

The Secretary of State was on holiday during the crisis. I have no doubt that it was a well-deserved holiday. It must be exhausting setting up quangos here, abolishing byelaws there, listening intently to trade unionists and councillors and generally being the caring, sharing face of Scottish Conservatism.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): And then ignoring them.

Mr. Salmond: Then ignoring them, as the hon. Gentleman says. It must be exhausting to come into the office every day in the sure and certain knowledge, as we see again from today's System 3 poll, that Scotland remains solidly against the Tories and that the impact of "young Lochinvar", as Lady Thatcher once memorably described the Secretary of State, has been only to force Tory support downwards.

In my view, exhausted as the Secretary of State undoubtedly was, he had a clear obligation to return to duty over the holiday period when it was obvious that the

scale of the problem facing Scots in every part of our country was greater than could be imagined. There were, after all, many others—plumbers, electricity linesmen, road workers, housing officers, social workers and a huge cast of unnamed heroes—who abandoned the turkey and plum pudding to help those in trouble. They set a selfless example; that example should have been set from the very top of the Scottish Office structure.

Hon. Members may well ask what the difference would have been if the Secretary of State had taken personal charge. I suggest that the very inaction and lack of direction at the Scottish Office during the Secretary of State's absence show that it might have made a difference. I say that not with any great admiration for the Secretary of State's abilities and powers, but because in Scotland today, the only Minister with the power of initiative is the Secretary of State himself.

As well as telling us something of the calibre of the other Scottish Ministers in the dying days of this Government, that fact tells us a great deal about the way in which the Secretary of State runs his Department. Such is the centralist power of the Secretary of State and the effect of his purification of the machinery of government that without the king, the court is incapable of action. The Scottish Office was as incapable of movement as the water in the pipes of hundreds of thousands of homes across Scotland. The result was departmental inaction amid general chaos.

What did the mice do when the cat was away? The hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside, who is replying to the debate—we should give him credit for that—wrote himself out of the script at the first opportunity. His response to an appeal to see for himself the difficulties caused by the weather was to say to the *Daily Record* on 4 January this year that he would

"just get in the way".

That might well be a sign of appealing modesty but if so, I am at a loss to understand why he should be responding for the Government in today's debate.

The facts of the exceptional weather are these. From Christmas eve until at least 1 January, and later in some parts, the low temperatures experienced were exceptional. Glasgow recorded its coldest temperature ever on two successive nights—a record-breaking minus 19 deg. One highland village achieved an unofficial record of the lowest temperature ever recorded in Scotland—almost minus 32 deg. In Shetland, the deepest snowfall since the war cut off hundreds of homes and led to the constant use of an evacuation helicopter for medical emergencies.

Road safety was compromised when water and even de-icing fluid froze as it was being applied to windscreens, not just in the north, but on the M8 in the centre of Scotland. Rail travel was disrupted and some airports were closed for lengthy periods. The west and the north of Scotland were colder than Moscow, without the everyday experience of such conditions that makes life bearable and possible.

The domestic effect of those low temperatures was dramatic. In Strathclyde region alone, half a million homes were reported to have suffered burst pipes and 34,000 homes were without water. That does not take into account the rural homes in places such as Argyll where private systems were, no doubt, frozen for days on end. In Grampian, the water supply was devastated. Domestic and industrial cut-offs were common and many old folk and families with young children were put in a truly desperate situation.

Those are the facts. For each individual affected, especially at the festive season, it was an unpleasant and worrying time. Yet what was the considered response of the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside? What was his ministerial summation of the situation? As he grandly claimed to the *Daily Record*, it was not a "major problem".

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Kynoch): If the hon. Gentleman is going to continue to quote a fabricated story by one Scottish newspaper, he will not make anything constructive out of the debate, which we all, I am sure, wish to try to do.

Mr. Salmond: The Minister will have plenty of time in which to answer. Although I do not claim that everything that appears in the press is accurate, the *Daily Record* seems pretty sure of the story. I hope that the Minister is taking action against the newspaper if it has misquoted him on a matter of such importance to Scotland.

I suspect that the folk memory of those patrician and patronising phrases will come to haunt the Minister for a long time. They may have the same currency as "The national health service is safe in our hands," and they may even match the prophecy by Michael Fish that there would be no hurricane. Even today, the Minister's remarks are reverberating. In another of his ill-judged comments during the crisis, he censured Grampian region for the closure of schools. It was noted in *The Scotsman* today that he was described yesterday in Grampian region, in a show of unity between the Labour, Liberal Democrat and Scottish National parties in that region, as a "buffoon".

Lack of water was the worst problem, which led to many people queuing in the streets with buckets. Lack of power was another major difficulty in Scotland. At Christmas time, 30,000 customers lost power in the Scottish Hydro-Electric area alone. Winds were blowing up to 115 mph. In East Lothian, gas supplies were disrupted for up to 72 hours. The state of transport meant that coal and oil deliveries were disrupted, and pressure on plumbers meant that if central heating went off, it stayed off for a long period.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for referring to East Lothian. While he is right to say that gas supplies were cut off for 15,000 of my constituents for up to three days, the situation was worse than that. British Gas provided some households with electric heaters to make up for the loss of their gas heating, but the surge in demand for electricity that followed resulted in the failure of the electricity supply in some streets. This has been a catastrophe for people who will have to pay enormous costs because of their burst pipes and the failure of the gas supply. British Gas TransCo is offering them £20 compensation. I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees that that privatised utility should be required contractually to pay more compensation to all concerned.

Mr. Salmond: I certainly agree with the hon. Gentleman. All hon. Members will agree that there can

[Mr. Salmond]

be no greater criticism of British Gas than to say that that is sadly typical of its response to a whole range of situations in Scotland and elsewhere in the past few years. Hon. Members have illustrated some serious problems, but there were others.

The absence of effective cold weather payments for pensioners and those on benefit—a subject to which I shall return—meant that Scotland's winter death rate, already higher than Scandinavia's, began to rise. In some places, it was running at three times the normal rate. Hospitals have been forced to cancel hundreds of non-urgent operations because of the increased administration following the severe weather and the difficulties it caused. There is a winter crisis in Scotland's health service every year, but this year it has been much worse.

Schools were also badly affected. More than 500 were unable to open last Monday for the new session. Some children are still having to be accommodated in temporary classrooms or schools because water and other damage will take months to fix. I am sure that hon. Members from all over Scotland have their own horror stories of problems that they have encountered in their constituencies. But the overall agreement must be that this was a major national emergency that should have been dealt with—and, if possible, helped—by Government action. The conclusion that we must draw from what we have experienced in the past few weeks is that Government action was not forthcoming when necessary.

In my constituency, all of those who could help turned out to help. For example, the chaotic conditions meant that the director of housing was unable to contact the jammed lines of the local radio station. The station in my area—and others across Scotland—did a first-class job in trying to communicate information to the public. My office had to provide a means of communication between the director of housing and the local radio station. People wanted daily and, indeed, hourly information, and it was a pity that the Scottish Office did so little to co-ordinate or assist in that demand.

I accept that there are lessons to be learnt by all the agencies and services that were challenged by the difficulties and sometimes had great difficulty coping. Some of the companies will admit that they need to review their procedures and basic assumptions so that they are better able to respond if such conditions recur. I received a letter from Robert Young, chief executive of Hydro-Electric, in response to a letter that I wrote to him on Boxing day, which referred to the difficulties of answering the huge volume of calls which rained down on the company over the period.

We are told by some weather experts that we may be entering a period of more extreme weather conditions during winter and, we hope, summer. We must therefore be able to plan sensibly for the increasing vagaries of the weather, rather than always being reduced to responding to a crisis. Following the failure of the emergency systems to cope with the scale of the crisis, there may be deeper lessons to be learnt involving the historic under-investment in the utilities, which might explain why the services broke down on such a large scale in the first place.

These and other related matters require a thorough examination, and I very much welcome the decision of the Scottish Affairs Select Committee to mount an inquiry into exactly what went wrong during the big freeze and what can be done about it. In response to the crisis conditions, emergency staff, the utilities, local government and voluntary workers in my view did everything that they could as soon as they could. That is not the issue at stake today. But while everyone else was doing their level best, the key ingredient—the national co-ordinating role that the Scottish Office could and should have provided—was missing.

No one denies that the severity of the weather would have led to difficulties whatever the scale and nature of the Scottish Office response, but the difficulties could have been greatly lessened if a national effort, co-ordinated by the Scottish Office and including the distribution of practical information on how to deal with the problems of frozen or burst pipes, had been made.

According to information received by my office from the Scottish Office information directorate yesterday, there exists in the files at St. Andrew's house a short public information film on how to respond to the problems caused by burst pipes. At a time when householders were struggling with frozen and burst pipes and with water running down walls and through ceilings throughout Scotland, it is outrageous that that film was not shown. Why was the film not offered for showing by national and regional television stations in Scotland? Why was appropriate audio material not provided for local radio stations to transmit? The film was not broadcast during the most severe water crisis for more than 20 years. Perhaps the Minister will tell us when he thinks it appropriate to broadcast it. Judging by the Government's incompetence, we can look forward to seeing the film in perhaps June or July.

One of my favourite childhood memories is a similar film that was frequently broadcast in the 1960s, which starred—if I remember correctly—Dr. Snoddy of "Dr. Finlay's Casebook" fame. If the Scottish Office could provide such information regularly during the 1960s, why could it not be done in the 1990s? Given the enormous public interest in the weather problems, the broadcasting media would have been extremely grateful to have received such material, and that has been confirmed by senior broadcasters.

The BBC's "Frontline Scotland" programme was so keen to track down the 1960s film starring Dr. Snoddy that it set in train a series of investigations. I can inform the House that the film was traced to a company called Water Training International at Kilwinning in Ayrshire, where it forms part of the instruction programme for the Scottish and Northern Ireland Plumbing Employers' Federation. The Minister must explain why such public information was not shown during the crisis.

Where were the full-page advertisements in newspapers providing people with practical information, such as the appropriate emergency telephone numbers to ring? Such things could and should have been done by the Scottish Office, but none was. In what I thought was a lame attempt to defend the indefensible, a Scottish Office spokesperson was reported in the Scottish *Daily Mail* on 16 January to have said:

"News releases were constantly sent out".

Freezing families and flooded-out businesses needed not Scottish Office faxes trying to put a gloss on ministerial inactivity, but practical information and co-ordinated activity.

Even yesterday—some three weeks after the event—the Scottish Office information directorate could not provide my office with information about which Ministers were on duty on which days during the holiday period. I was incredulous when my office told me that. So that the Minister understands the difficulties that people have in getting common sense out of the Scottish Office, I shall explain what happened when my researcher contacted the Scottish Office yesterday.

My researcher called the Scottish Office four times, and was told four times that she would be called back. She was called back once. She estimated that she spent one hour being passed from staff member to staff member. Initially, she asked which Minister was on duty during the holiday period, but two press officers were unable to tell her. They said that she would be called back, but that did not happen. A second call was passed by one of the previous press officers to the press officer at the Secretary of State's department, who said that my researcher would be called back. That has not yet happened.

On her third call, my researcher tried the Scottish Office publicity section to ask about the "Keep Warm This Winter" phone line and the Scottish Office public information film. She was passed to another member of staff, who told her that no advertisement was taken out and that the Scottish Office films were 10 to 12 years old and were not being used this year. The story goes on. Can the Minister explain why, even after the event, the Department seems unable to give out information as to what he and his colleagues were doing during the crisis?

The Secretary of State, as we saw in the Scottish Grand Committee on Monday, has become rattled by the criticism that has been made by hon. Members from all parties. Perhaps that explains why he is not at the Dispatch Box today. Responding to journalists' questions earlier this month, the Secretary of State attempted to pass all responsibility for public information to local authorities. This new-found desire to extend the role of local government is somewhat surprising from a Minister who has spent most of his career trying to cut it to the bone. It is also a pathetic and evasive response. The problems that we encountered over the holiday period were national in character, not local. The newspapers and broadcasting stations which should have been targeted and provided with publicity and information extend far beyond even the largest of the local authority boundaries. Local authorities did all that they could, but there was a clear need for the Scottish Office to step in and adopt that national co-ordinating role.

To give the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside, his due, the passing of the buck to local authorities was one of the few initiatives that he took to respond to the crisis. He led his Secretary of State in that, if in nothing else. The Minister may wish to deny this also, but in the *Daily Record* of 4 January 1996 he said:

"the current problems are the responsibility of the local authorities and, at this stage, to have a minister out and about would be irresponsible. It's my judgement that to go out and be photographed visiting affected areas would be taking up the time of people who are working to rectify the problems".

That is in somewhat sharp contrast to the Secretary of State's post-match explanation on Monday, when he told the Scottish Grand Committee that Ministers were "out and about".

I must warn the Under-Secretary that—if he is keeping an eye on his boss's opinion—his reticence seems to be out of step with another opinion which the Secretary of State gave to the Grand Committee on Monday. He said:

"I take a pretty dim view of the sort of politicians who sit by their firesides and do not even get out to see what is happening on the ground".—[*Official Report, Scottish Grand Committee*, 15 January 1996; c. 4.]

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): My hon. Friend will recall that during the floods which hit our area of Scotland in September, the Minister was not shy about getting into a helicopter and visiting the flooded areas without even mentioning it to the local Members of Parliament, who were busy co-ordinating activities between the local authorities and others dealing with the emergency.

Mr. Salmond: We all remember the Minister not being backward in coming forward on that occasion. I think that it is possible to go on a fact-finding mission in order to gain a better understanding of people's problems without elaborate photo opportunities.

Apparently the buck is not to stop with the Secretary of State, nor with the Under-Secretary of State. On Monday, the Secretary of State for Scotland told the Grand Committee that "the buck stops" with local authorities. It does not stop with local authorities. Scotland is saying that the Secretary of State for Scotland must accept the responsibility which goes with that office. Taking the responsibility is, or should be, his job.

If the Secretary of State has not been attending to the call of duty, what has he been doing? He has been busy pursuing his own political agenda. On 5 January, when Scotland was beginning to recover, hospitals were still under severe pressure, consumers were still without water and the extent of the problems in schools was only just being discovered, he revealed the fruits of his holiday meditation. In his first engagement after the holidays, he unveiled a political poster during a news conference and photo opportunity. He continued his attack on constitutional change. It was only then that it dawned on him that he himself was under attack, and he hurriedly arranged a visit to Strathclyde water services.

The poster is not an issue in this debate, nor is it that the Minister could not even handle its launch correctly—within four hours, it was discovered that the poster about Scottish jobs had been produced in Dublin and had to be covered up the next afternoon. What matters is the sense of priorities held by the Tories' man in Scotland—as opposed to Scotland's man in government.

The Secretary of State's actions show where his priorities are. Many Opposition Members think that there is a great deal wrong with a Scottish Office that is capable of spending public money on monitoring the media during the big freeze, but was incapable of delivering its own information to the media on how to deal with burst pipes. The Secretary of State would rather freeze comment, opinion and debate in Scotland than bring some warmth and relief to ordinary people's lives.

In my view, the moral duty of the Secretary of State and his Ministers is to resign. We cannot hold any expectation that they will volunteer to do that today, so I should like to pursue the subject of what the ministerial team could now do, after the event, to improve the position and provide redress and relief.

[Mr. Salmond]

The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities estimates that the cost of weather damage to housing alone will be £25 million to £30 million. It is now proposed that there will be £16.8 million of extra borrowing consent, which fails to remedy even part of the problem, before we consider the huge bill for damaged schools and the many other costs that will accrue.

In relation to council properties, we note that the third member of the ministerial team, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), was anxious to duck his responsibilities and pass the buck. The Under-Secretary was caught out more quickly than the other Ministers with his ill-informed remarks about local authorities insuring their properties. After chiding them for having inadequate cover, he has been squirming because, as has been repeatedly pointed out, it was his Government who commended self-insurance to local authorities, yet the Scottish Office does not insure its own buildings. The hon. Member for Aberdeen, South nods. I am glad that he has finally realised that.

The hon. Gentleman argues that the Scottish Office should not act as an insurer of last resort for local authorities. Who is to act as the insurer of last resort for the Scottish Office? Who does he expect to pay the £5,000 bill, for example, for the Scottish Office building that was flooded in the crisis? If he remembers the previous Prime Minister's words, she said that there was no such thing as Government money, only public money. If he expects the Scottish Office to be treated in that way, why does he not understand the plight of local authorities in a national emergency?

Today I ask the Ministers for a clear, unambiguous statement on financial compensation. I ask them not to dodge the issue or appeal to the principle of self-help, which they so lamentably failed to observe themselves. Will they tell us what measures will be put in place, and when, and whether proper and adequate financial compensation will be forthcoming for those local authorities? At one time during the emergency, the Minister praised them for the work which they were doing.

The extremely cold conditions in Scotland this year also brought into sharp relief the country's prevailing climatic conditions. Even in a normal winter, Scotland is a cold place where many people experience great difficulties. In a land of energy plenty, the problem of fuel poverty affects 800,000 households. Even in a normal winter, 3,000 people die of cold-related illnesses in Scotland each and every year.

The incidence of winter deaths is greater in Scotland than in Scandinavia, which has a more severe climate. Last year, during a relatively mild winter, 239 Scots died of hypothermia. That is a damning indictment of the amount of support provided to those people by the Government. Instead of a ramshackle cold weather payment system, what is needed is a guaranteed cold weather allowance for pensioners and others on benefit throughout the winter months. The SNP believes that that can be achieved in the context of an independent Scotland. We propose automatic payment to those in need throughout the winter of sums ranging from £7.40 to £11.15 a week. The total cost of such a system would be £170 million per annum, less than 6 per cent. of this year's estimated revenues from the North sea. Other countries, such as Ireland, already have such a system. It is a disgrace that an energy-rich country such as Scotland does not. We must end the scandal of fuel poverty amid energy plenty in Scotland.

I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) was successful in queuing for a ten-minute Bill last night. Therefore, the House will soon have another opportunity to debate the important issue of cold weather payments. It is not just the SNP which commends that to the House. Every pensioner and benefit claimant in Scotland, all of whom have experienced at first hand in recent weeks the effect of our climate, will want to see that measure given broad support.

The extreme weather conditions over the holiday period in Scotland were a natural phenomenon. We cannot avoid such crises, but we can act effectively to overcome the worst effects of them. The Scottish Office, led by the Secretary of State and staffed by his colleagues, failed to act. In my view, they were in dereliction of their duty. No one perhaps can be surprised at yet another failure by Tory Ministers. That is why this governing party commands the support of one in 10 of the Scottish population. This year's big freeze provides Scotland with yet another example of how badly governed Scotland is within the context of the Union. Even within my admittedly pessimistic view of how the structures of government operate for Scotland, in this debate we will hear that the experience of the big freeze provided something which was worse even than our lowest expectations. We want and need explanations, and we should have resignations and apologies. I hope that we will have no more bluff and bluster, and no more excuses and piling the blame on everyone except those who have clear responsibilities to lead and to act.

At the very least, we should receive a clear undertaking that in future there will be a clear recognition that the primary role of the Scottish Office is not as a ministry of propaganda and photo opportunities, but as a department of public information and public service. That is what Scotland has the right to expect, and it is a measure of the ultimate failure of the Government and the ministerial team that today we have to demand it once again.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Before I call the next speaker, I remind the House that we have 35 minutes before the closing speeches. Obviously, a fair number of hon. Members wish to contribute, so I make an appeal for some short speeches.

11.30 am

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this important debate, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) on obtaining it. I was saddened by his speech, because we could learn so much from the experience that we all had. We could have learnt lessons that would make positive contributions towards dealing with people's problems.

One of the comments made by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan shows clearly that he missed the opportunity to learn from the events. He sweepingly mentioned pensioners in Scotland. I am a pensioner and I have no intention of accepting public money for freezing conditions. Unlike others, I do not think that all pensioners need such assistance and support.

I live in probably the most modern house erected in a long time. It was built to the highest specifications laid down for United Kingdom building, yet I suffered five bursts in the main pipes serving the upstairs radiators of that modern house, which is only a few months old. Those five bursts show that the conditions were unique. One lesson that can be learnt is that, obviously, the highest standards laid down today for building in Scotland are not adequate for the conditions that we may meet.

I say "may meet" because I remember vividly the freeze of 1946-47, which the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan probably does not. I was in the Royal Air Force and every station was closed down. We were sent home because we could not heat the billets and the messes. I also vividly remember the conditions in the freeze of the 1960s and, again, I was in the Royal Air Force. The hon. Gentleman must realise that some of us have been down this road before.

I have seen the film that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. If that film had been shown on television, he would have chastised my hon. Friend the Minister for showing an out-of-date and irrelevant film.

I am not opposed to national activity to help cope with such situations as the cold weather caused. I welcome the fact that the Scottish Select Committee will look into the matter. Members of the Scottish Select Committee who are here will know that, on Monday, I suggested that that inquiry should have a very narrow remit and know exactly what it is doing. In that way, we can produce a report that will concentrate on suggesting solutions to the problem, and not on attacking individuals.

Like the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan, I wish to place on record my thanks to my local authority, which responded marvellously. I also thank Scottish Hydro-Electric, which in my area responded magnificently, the water authorities and British Gas. The people on duty while others were on holiday did a remarkable job in the most severe conditions that one could expect. That does not mean that lessons cannot be learnt, because they can always be learnt.

We should not be carried away by scandalised reports in a Scottish newspaper. If we were to believe some of the stuff in the papers, few of us would be here doing a worthwhile job, because hon. Members from all parties have been on the receiving end of stories in the papers at some time. Newspapers often use a story to create an issue with little regard for the truth.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan mentioned insurance. In Strathclyde, where the local authority paid to insure its buildings and schools, how will the people feel if they are asked to pay to bail out local authorities that did not insure themselves? That is what devolution means—giving authority to people at local level to make judgments, right or wrong.

We can learn another lesson from the events. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan suggested that Strathclyde should be made to pay for somebody else's decision. That is wrong. If one authority decides to carry the risk—because that is what it is—and another authority decides to pay for insurance, why should the authority that has paid bail out the other?

The difference between the Scottish Office and local government is that all Government Departments are paid for by all taxpayers. One group of taxpayers is not given benefits over others, and the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan failed to take note of that. When one local authority decides that it is not going to take out insurance cover, it should make that clear. It should tell the people that it is offering a council tax lower than it would be—or should be—if it took out insurance cover. Then the local people would know that, in the event of another episode of severe weather—which seems to occur about every 20 years—they would have to pick up the tab. That is real local decision making, and the hon. Gentleman got it wrong. He should not suggest something that will disadvantage one group of Scots against another.

There are lessons to be learnt from this episode. I have taken note of what you said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I shall stop now. If the Scottish Select Committee can produce a helpful report and the Government can respond quickly, we might learn some positive lessons, but we shall get nowhere by attacking personalities.

11.37 am

Mr. David Marshall (Glasgow, Shettleston): As one of many hon. Members who applied for a debate on this important subject but who was unsuccessful in the ballot, I congratulate the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) on his good luck. I also thank him for allowing time for other hon. Members to participate, and I shall be brief.

Over the festive season, Scotland had not just severe weather, but exceptionally severe weather. Record low temperatures were established and the country had never known weather like it since record keeping started. The whole country was affected, but Glasgow suffered especially. For several days, it was one of the coldest cities in the world. Temperatures were recorded of minus 20 deg and even lower. Such freezing weather could not have been foreseen and nothing could have been done in advance to cope with the situation.

I wish to tell the House just how badly Glasgow's housing stock was hit by the weather. I am grateful to Mrs. Margaret Vass, the head of development for Glasgow city council, for some statistics for the period from 23 December to 11 January. During that time, 42,910 emergency repair requests were issued as a result of the severe frost and the subsequent thaw. In a normal winter, the number of such repair requests is around 2,000. Sometimes more than one request was made for the same houses because they had burst pipes on several different days, but about 25,000 council houses were affected, plus several thousand other houses in the city. Over 2,000 of them were in the east end of Glasgow and in my constituency.

I am glad to say that of the total number of necessary repairs reported, City Build has completed about 31,000—a remarkable record in such a short space of time. Of the outstanding repairs, about 9,500 relate to high-cost emergency reinstatement—work estimated to cost £5.5 million. The estimated provisional cost to the council for turning off water and for repairing burst pipes is £2.5 million, to repair major damage, £5.5 million, to pay for staff overtime, £150,000, for emergency equipment, £60,000, for temporary flats being refurnished and repaired, £450,000, for bed-and-breakfast accommodation, £50,000 and for lost rents, £400,000. That adds up to a grand total of £9.11 million. Those costs may vary, but if anything, they are likely to increase before the final figure is known. I suggest that a sum of £10 million is much more likely.

[Mr. David Marshall]

Just in case anyone thinks that those costs are excessive, it should be borne in mind that 25,000 houses and possibly 50,000 people or more were affected, and that more than 1,000 families had to leave their homes and be put up in temporary accommodation by the council. That does not include the many thousands who left their homes and went to live with relatives and friends, before being able to return home once repairs had been carried out. Moreover, many of the days involved were public holidays, which incurred additional expenditure and caused more difficulties.

Perhaps one of the saddest aspects of the results of the freeze will be the delays to other much needed projects and normal repairs—to housing improvements and modernisation, and to other capital projects. Everything will be slowed down now and people will suffer for months and possibly years to come.

Glasgow has seen nothing like this weather in living memory. Like other hon. Members, I pay tribute to everyone who helped in the crisis: the plumbers and tradesmen who worked day and night, the water, gas and electricity workers, the Army who helped to provide emergency water supplies in parts of the city, Clyde Action, and Radio Clyde, which set up a special freeze line that helped many people when they needed it most. I also thank all the volunteers who helped others, Strathclyde regional council and social work department, Glasgow district council, and the city's housing department and City Build. Those last two departments are much more used to criticism than to praise, but on this occasion they did a magnificent job, keeping offices and depots open at all hours through holidays and weekends. Staff did all they could to cope with the crisis.

It is always invidious to single out individuals for praise because some who deserve it more than others may be missed out. My constituency includes a higher than average number of elderly and vulnerable people and of the unemployed and people on low incomes. Rosemary Hendry and Dave Hanratty of the Whiterose tenant management co-operative in the Parkhead area of the city opened their community hall and cared for 15 families at a time. They put in beds and fed and looked after those people, who ranged from babies to an old woman of nearly 80. They certainly did a tremendous job. Frank Kelly co-ordinated efforts in Barrowfield, which was particularly hard hit by the effects of the weather.

There were many similar examples throughout the city and doubtless throughout Scotland of people helping others. Their efforts are to be contrasted with the lack of effort on the part of the Government—particularly the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch), the miscalled Minister responsible for industry and local government. He is quoted as having complained that it was his day off: he was not, he said, the duty Minister. It seemed that he was content to sit on his backside at home in front of the fire. No wonder the *Daily Record* described him on its front page as "A big drip". I do not like criticising other Members, but this time I feel that the Minister's actions left a great deal to be desired. He should have done much more to deal with the crisis.

The Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Scotland have it all wrong. In replies to my written questions, they both refused to visit the hardest hit areas and chose instead to concentrate on water supplies. But the problem is not about water supplies; it is about restoring people's homes so that they can get back to normality. The Government seem more worried about the loss of water than about the loss of accommodation.

There have already been references to the insurance problems. It is estimated that almost half the tenants affected in Glasgow had no contents insurance. Before Conservative Members tell me that that was their own fault, I might point out that insurance costs are high. People who are unemployed or on low incomes but who have families to look after and must choose between paying for insurance or feeding their kids will inevitably choose to feed the kids: it is no contest. Many people have no insurance, not because they do not want it, but because they cannot afford it. Poverty is a terrible thing and the city of Glasgow is full of it.

The supreme irony is that while people were losing all their possessions and were in the depths of despair, the rollover jackpot in the national lottery rose to £42 million, with record profits being made for the company. There must be some way of devoting some of the money raised by such schemes to good causes such as helping people when they most need help. Who can think of a better good cause? I can think of none. I do not see why there cannot be a special fund to use some of the money thus generated to help people who have lost everything.

As far as I am aware, the Department of Social Security and the Benefits Agency are not giving grants to people who have suffered loss; they are giving them loans. But people who could afford to pay off loans at £8 or £10 a week would not need the loans in the first place—they could go out and buy replacements for what they had lost. I therefore hope that the Secretary of State and the Cabinet will argue for additional money to be given to local Benefits Agency offices, so that they can give people grants to buy bedding, clothing, cooking equipment and the other essentials of daily life that they have lost because their ceilings have collapsed or their pipes have burst.

The Minister must seriously consider the hardship suffered by people throughout Scotland and must do all that he can to help local authorities by giving them additional resources. Let him do that and earn, for once, the gratitude of all the victims of this disaster.

11.46 am

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Hon. Members will recall that when the news about the bad weather broke, it tended to focus at first on my constituency, which between Christmas eve and new year's day experienced some of the heaviest snowfalls in memory, with drifts of up to 30 ft reported in places. I shall not indulge in semantic arguments about when a state of emergency is a state of emergency. Let us be clear, however: these were exceptional circumstances, which rightly prompted Shetland Islands council to activate its emergency response plan. It would appear that it proceeded to co-ordinate the various services remarkably well.

Obviously, people wanted the roads cleared sooner than they were, but we should not underestimate the size of the task. Besides road clearance, important work was done by the social work department, which concentrated on providing help for the vulnerable and the elderly. Fine work

was also done by the health board—by nurses, doctors and district nurses, who kept the health service going, ably supported by the helicopter services of the coastguard. BBC Radio Shetland came back on air between Christmas and new year and provided an important flow of information. The people themselves were responsible for many acts of neighbourliness and showed their resilience in coping with the exceptional weather.

It would be churlish not to acknowledge the response by the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch), who made it clear that Government resources were available, including military resources which were under review at the time and which were thought not to be necessary. As acknowledged in the local press, he was in regular contact with the islands council and no doubt put his knowledge of the islands to good use, making it quite clear throughout the period that the appropriate Government assistance would be available if required.

Obviously, I know more about my own constituency than about any other, but my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) has lent me a series of press releases relating to water supplies, issued by Grampian regional council. They show just how much activity there was trying to cope with the disaster. It is important not to lose sight of the people who did remarkable work to restore vital services.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): Will my hon. Friend confirm that although there has been some controversy, particularly in the Western Isles, the individuals who performed heroically included local representatives of Scottish Hydro-Electric? Does he agree that, when we and our hon. Friends had the opportunity of a discussion with the chairman and chief executive of that company last week, we learnt of an important subsequent development? They are considering an improved communications system between the central offices in Perth and the outlying areas, to ensure a better flow of information in both directions on instances of power failure and—equally important, if not more so—the restoration of power supplies.

Mr. Wallace: I agree with my hon. Friend on both points. I certainly agree about the work done by individual linesmen and the subsequent response of the chairman and chief executive of Scottish Hydro-Electric.

In circumstances such as this, there is a constant temptation to blame someone. We seem to have got ourselves into the situation in which everything is someone's fault. We blame Scottish Hydro-Electric, the Government, local government or whatever. In the immediate aftermath, the Secretary of State and his Ministers got their priorities wrong—to unveil a poster campaign against the plans of the Scottish Constitutional Convention was completely the wrong set of priorities.

Equally, although I have praised the Under-Secretary of State, he was wrong to blame Grampian region for closing schools for an extra day. Today's edition of *The Scotsman* states that the chairman of the education committee

"said that Mr. Kynoch's remarks had 'demolished the morale' of council employees working flat out to cope with the crisis."

Obviously, in exceptional weather conditions mistakes will be made. We are all very good at the perfection of hindsight. In the midst of trying to cope, people will inevitably make mistakes. The weather was exceptional and party colleagues to whom I have spoken in Glasgow—perhaps hon. Members representing Glasgow can confirm this—said that it was a very dry cold and that people might not have recognised just how low the temperature had plummeted. As a result, precautions might not have been taken.

Recriminations do not always help. The real blame will lie if lessons are not learnt, and we must see where they can be learnt. There will be lessons to be learnt with regard to what the Government can do and their role in public information. Having said that, however, I am not sure whether the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) saw what his local council did—it inserted a full half-page advertisement in *The Aberdeen Press and Journal* on 3 January, which went to considerable lengths to advise water customers.

Mr. Salmond: That is the point.

Mr. Wallace: The hon. Gentleman says that that is exactly the point, but perhaps a clear idea of the responsibilities of local and of national Government is required. If local government is providing the information, I am not sure that there is a case for national Government repeating it. There must be clear demarcation lines as to who is responsible and, if necessary, we must make sure that the financial resources are there to ensure that it is done.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall) rightly identified the fact that we are talking about many people's homes and households. I hope that central Government will respond to the problems that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities brought to the attention of the Minister responsible for housing—the scale of the damage to the public housing stock. We are talking about people's homes. It is an immediate problem and the debate should not be protracted over a considerable time.

Local authorities should be examining their emergency plans to find out whether they can be improved. With the advent of the water authorities after April, it will be important to ensure proper co-ordination between them and the local authorities. One complaint, particularly in Grampian, is that while it is accepted that the statutory and prime responsibility is to reconnect domestic supplies—quite rightly—efforts should be made to ensure that industrial users are not disconnected for as long as they were on this occasion.

Scottish Hydro-Electric was another target, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) pointed out, the linesmen responded well. My hon. Friend the Member for Gordon reminded me that, in 1984 when there was heavy snow in his constituency, 20,000 people were cut off for two weeks. I suspect that lessons have been learnt from that exercise because there was nothing on quite that scale on this occasion. That does not mean that people should become complacent. The meeting to which my hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye referred was very constructive, with Scottish Hydro-Electric identifying the fact that its communications were far from adequate and that there is a greater need to ensure a better flow of information to and from customers who are cut off and who want to know when they will be reconnected. The company also accepted that much more could be done to improve the helicopter operation in Shetland to get heavy lifting gear in place, particularly when areas are cut off because of the snow.

[Mr. Wallace]

As individuals, we also must consider what we can learn from such experiences. One of the problems is that we all have greater expectations, and there is nothing wrong with that—it prompts Governments and companies such as Scottish Hydro-Electric to provide a better service—but we should not always take things for granted. If our houses are all-electric, we must face up to the fact that there might be times of the year when alternative sources of energy must be available.

On insurance, I echo a point made by the hon. Member for Shettleston. Income support levels do not take into account the payment of any element as a premium for insurance. If the Government are not the insurer of last resort and if people have to pay for insurance, will the Minister point out to his colleagues in the Department of Social Security that they must have the resources to allow them to pay insurance premiums? As the hon. Gentleman said, I suspect that if the choice is between food and an insurance premium, one will buy food. At the moment, such premiums are not included in the calculation.

People must also be able properly to identify what to expect from the authorities. The Shetland Islands council was asked at one stage to provide disposable nappies, which is not the responsibility of local government. We must tackle our own individual responsibilities.

Many lessons must be learnt and, as there may yet be more cold spells this winter, they must be learnt immediately. If they are not and there are more such failures of supply, the scope for recrimination will be much greater than it was for what was an exceptional period of cold weather over Christmas and the new year.

11.56 am

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): I do not think that it is necessarily important to apportion blame for any aspect of what happened due to the severe cold weather. It is much more important to look ahead and ask how we can deal with the problems that have been shown to result from such severe weather.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall) eruditely outlined the situation in Glasgow in its widest context. As he said, many of the problems are poverty related. I want to concentrate on health service provision. The crisis in the past few weeks graphically highlighted the fact that the national health service in Scotland is simply unable to cope with the demands placed on it today, irrespective of severe weather. The reduction in the number of beds in recent years, particularly in Glasgow, and the lack of proper central planning following the introduction of an internal market within the NHS have left it unable to cope and to respond flexibly to the demands put on it.

Last week, I was faced with a ridiculous situation in two of the acute hospitals in my constituency. Glasgow royal infirmary had bodies piled high in rooms that were not mortuaries. They were left there for days because the hospital could not cope with the demand, and that was not entirely due to the freeze and to the fact that there could be no burials. The system was unable to cope with the severe numbers.

Clearly, severe cold means that more people, particularly the elderly, die and we accept that. Hypothermia is a serious aspect of the problem, but none the less Glasgow royal infirmary, which is perhaps the major hospital in Scotland, was unable to cope with the demands placed upon it and to provide the sort of service for which we have all been paying over the years and which we are entitled to expect.

The lack of flexibility was also shown at Victoria infirmary, which is also in my constituency. When I visited that hospital last week to discuss with management the problems that had resulted, it was interesting to note that no women were being referred there as emergency cases by general practitioners and ambulances, as the hospital had no women's emergency beds left. They had to be ferried onwards to the Southern General, if they could be accommodated there. They were shunted round the city at a time of great need. The management made it clear to me that the crisis had resulted not from the freeze-up or from staff illnesses, although they were contributory factors, but from the fact that the system simply did not provide sufficient beds to deal with the number of cases that were being referred to the hospital.

Obviously, the cold weather caused problems at Victoria infirmary. I understand that there were 83 deaths, mainly of elderly people, at Christmas and the new year, compared with 27 in the same period last year, but it was stressed that the system was not sufficiently flexible and had no slack to take account of extremities in the weather. There were also problems in the summer during the heatwave.

Almost 1,000 elective surgical operations had to be postponed during the crisis. All the patients who required non-urgent surgery did not get their operations. That sums up what is happening in the health service. It cannot cope with the demands that are placed upon it. By all accounts, the position in England, particularly in London, is even worse, but that is no consolation to those of us in Scotland who fought to preserve a health service to provide care at a time of need, free of charge and within a reasonable response time.

I am particularly concerned by newspaper reports in the past couple of days that Victoria infirmary is considering contracting out another 500 jobs and perhaps losing its auxiliary nursing service. The shortage of auxiliary nurses in the new year meant that some operations had to be postponed.

I conclude by quoting Matthew Dunnigan, a consultant at Stobhill hospital, who had warned the Government in the past. After the events of the past few weeks, he said:

"You have to look at your needs in terms of coping with peak demand. That is something that is understood by people who run trains and buses, but not, apparently, by those who run the health service . . . but the Scottish Office are sticking to this aim of reducing beds by 5,000 before the year 2000."

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Watson: I am sorry, but I have no time. I am sure that the Under-Secretary can cover those points in his reply to the debate.

We must completely reassess the number of beds in Scotland. I call on the Government to introduce a moratorium—a freeze on any further bed closures—until the whole picture has been considered in the light of the events of the past month—

Dr. Godman: In Inverclyde as well.

Mr. Watson: Yes—in Inverclyde and in other parts of Scotland. We must make absolutely sure that the health service can provide the services that the people of Scotland are entitled to expect and for which they have paid.

12.1 pm

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): As someone who applied for a debate on this subject, I congratulate the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) on his success in the ballot, and thank him for allowing me to contribute.

I was perturbed at Hogmanay when a constituent rang me from the royal infirmary saying that water had been cut off in many wards. I telephoned the hospital and spoke to the director of water and drainage. Water was provided by the fire brigade on a temporary basis, but there was still rationing for several days. There should be emergency cover for hospitals in those circumstances.

My main concern is my constituents who were affected by burst pipes in their houses. Many of them do not have insurance. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall) that some Government money should be made available to them. I note that a written answer last week referred to loans and grants. Will the Minister please explain who is getting grants? I hope they will be widely available to poor constituents who cannot afford insurance, especially since the Government increased insurance tax last year.

There has been considerable damage to the fabric of houses. Edinburgh district council will have to spend £5 million to repair the damage to its housing stock. If no Government assistance is available, that will mean a rent increase of more than £3, in addition to the £3 increase that will be necessary in any case because Edinburgh, like many other places, receives no housing support grant.

The Minister may refer to the Bellwin formula. How much will that involve for Edinburgh, and how long will it take? I understand that, when it was applied in Perth recently, there was a delay of 18 months. That is not good enough for tenants in Edinburgh, who cannot possibly afford a £6 rent increase next year.

Finally, I have noticed that the council houses most affected in my constituency are those that have not been modernised. Those with central heating systems and lagged pipes were generally unaffected. That is yet another reason why the Government should not carry out the madness of slashing housing budgets next year. Warm homes can provide protection against damage for many tenants—and if the Minister is fed up with me going on about the cuts to the housing budget, he ain't heard nothing yet.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

12.4 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): I very much regret that my hon. Friends have been squeezed out of the debate. I welcome the debate, but it is far from sufficient to deal with a national emergency that should have had national co-ordination. Frankly, it should not have been a matter of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) being lucky enough in the lottery for Adjournment debates and to raise such a serious issue. I very much regret that my hon. Friends the Members for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald), for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) and for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) were unable to make important constituency points that should have been raised in the debate.

There should have been an oral statement to the House last Tuesday, and the fact that one was not made is deplorable. On such an important occasion, when we are debating a matter that affects so many thousands of citizens in Scotland, it is quite unacceptable that the Secretary of State for Scotland could not find time to answer the debate.

In Edinburgh on Monday, the Secretary of State for Scotland made snide comments about the fact that I did not speak in the debate on law and order. When I asked him whether he intended to speak at every debate in the Grand Committee, he said that he would speak on every important issue. However, he is not here today, and the people of Scotland will reach their own conclusions about his priorities.

Despite the parrot cries of somebody who says and thinks that he is a Minister of the Crown, I intend to be constructive in the debate and to put the role of the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), into perspective. Perhaps he should heed the advice of his fellow Ministers and remain quiet for the rest of the debate.

I shall concentrate on what needs to be done now to help councils and citizens in Scotland. Ministers have an opportunity to redeem themselves, and perhaps to give a lead on what can be done.

I begin by commending and congratulating the hundreds of public service workers in local councils and the public utilities, who gave up their holidays and left their homes to assist in dealing with the effects of the weather in Scotland over Christmas and the new year. No one who saw them on television, spoke to the countless numbers of Hydro-Electric and Scottish Power workers who recovered power to homes or saw the work of road clearers, transport workers, hospital, water and social workers, social security office workers and Scottish Office officials could be anything other than impressed by their real commitment to public service—which it is all too easy for Conservative Members to denigrate when it suits them.

The national emergency in Scotland was quite unprecedented in climatic terms. It deserved a response on a national basis and national co-ordination, and it is regrettable we did not get that. It is not good enough for the emperors of the Scottish Office to say that the buck stops with the local councils. They have the power, the control and the money, and it was their responsibility to take in hand what everyone regarded as an emergency.

It is rich to hear Conservative Members and Ministers complaining about scandalous and inaccurate treatment by the media. When the *Daily Record* ran an article about the Minister responsible for industry, whatever he has to say and plead today, and whatever wriggling excuses he has to put forward, that newspaper spoke for Scotland in the midst of a national emergency that affected so many Scottish people. It deserves commendation rather than denigration from Conservative Members. To blame school janitors for part of the problem is to stoop to desperate levels.

[Mr. George Robertson]

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), with his usual reasonableness, said that the Secretary of State committed an error of judgment on his first day back at work after a well-deserved holiday, when his priority was to unveil a propaganda poster rather than deal with the problems affecting the people of Scotland. The hon. Gentleman was a little too reasonable. The Secretary of State's behaviour was a spectacular display of indifference and cynicism, given all that we knew of the experience of people in Scotland. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman's 11 per cent. rating in today's opinion poll reflects the conclusion of the Scottish people.

Many Scottish authorities did that which the Scottish Office information department should have been asked to do—mount a serious campaign. The new shadow authority for South Lanarkshire, which is my own authority, widely publicised emergency telephone numbers that were called by people as far away as Shetland who were desperate for information about the crisis.

The heating bills that the public will receive over the next few weeks will be a nightmare for many of them. It was clear to many householders that the only way to protect their property was to turn up their heating to a level that they probably could not afford. In the next few weeks, bills will pop through letter boxes throughout Scotland, creating serious financial difficulty for many of the people who receive them.

Every one of those bills will include 8 per cent. value added tax. I hope that people in Scotland will remember that if Ministers had had their way, and had not been stopped in the House by a Labour-initiated campaign, 15.5 per cent. VAT would have been added to their heating bills. [HON. MEMBERS: "It would have been 17.5 per cent."] I was too reasonable to the Government for a moment, but that will not last.

It is not that long since the last, supposedly election-winning Budget was out of the way. Deep in its small print was a cut in home energy efficiency schemes, which have done so much to help people in Scotland to deal with severe weather. A sum of £3.1 million was taken out of those schemes, under which 200,000 Scottish homes have been insulated—but 20,000 will now be denied the help that was to be available. Building industry installers who planned according to Government promises have discovered yet again that a Tory promise is virtually worthless. That was a mean cut, especially in the circumstances in which people find themselves today. It was scandalous.

What can the Government do to help? How can the Minister redeem himself and the Government's reputation? [HON. MEMBERS: "He cannot."] He can and he should, and he has that opportunity today. Councils are crying out for help. The scale of the damage is massive. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities says that Scottish councils face bills of between £25 million and £30 million, in addition to their planned or forecast winter expenditure, to repair council houses.

That figure does not take into account schools and other properties damaged by burst pipes, which will probably double the estimate. Strathclyde regional council suggests that school repairs and extra staffing costs could involve expenditure as high as £12 million.

Councils are strapped for cash. The financial settlement announced recently is still being pored over by many councils and leaves them no room for manoeuvre, yet in 11 weeks' time the new unitary authorities are expected to be up and running. It is in no way reasonable to expect them to cope not only with the new challenges and costs of reorganisation but with the additional expense caused by the winter conditions.

I am acutely conscious that there is no pot of gold waiting to be thrown at Scotland's councils or the many people who need help, but central Government have the resources. There is a contingency reserve for precisely such situations. It is important to establish as quickly as possible how much money is available and how much is needed to help local councils, and how generous the Government will be. We expect the Minister to address that priority when he replies.

A letter from the Secretary of State for Scotland to his fellow Thatcherite who heads the Department of Social Security is not sufficient to deal with the misery and hardship that will be caused to many poor people throughout Scotland. The Benefits Agency has been inundated with demands for help. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) said, only loans have been given—not grants, which could have made a difference.

More resources must be devoted to the problem, so that the public will not have to continue enduring the misery from which they suffer at present. The Department of Social Security and the Benefits Agency need help, and they need it now. Scotland must learn, and learn quickly, from the lessons of this disaster. I am glad that the Scottish Affairs Select Committee has taken on board an emergency investigation. The priority is to assist local authorities to repair the damage caused. I hope that today's debate will allow them to get on with that important task.

12.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Kynoch): I join in congratulating the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) on securing this Adjournment debate, but that is probably all on which I will congratulate him. I am pleased to have the opportunity to respond on the Government's behalf to this interesting debate. The many good contributions have generally recognised the significant efforts made by many people during a period of severe cold weather.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall) spoke about housing problems and insurance, to which I hope to refer later. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), whose remarks I welcome, is aware of the communication links that were regularly provided between central and local government. I am grateful also for the hon. Gentleman's recognition that we must learn, so as to do things better in future.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) gave one of his usual positive and pragmatic speeches. He clearly understands the realities of difficult situations. He believes not in knocking but in being constructive and finding ways forward. I welcomed his contribution.

The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) spoke about the assistance sought by local authorities, and the Bellwin formula. It is up to local authorities to prepare details of their costs. I will refer to that aspect later.

I assure all hon. Members that the Government fully appreciate the concerns and distress produced by a dreadful combination of severe weather, starting in Shetland over Christmas and spreading to the whole country over the Hogmanay period. I join my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside in commending the many people in power companies, local authorities and emergency services, whose unstinting efforts over the holiday period helped to restore essential services as quickly as weather conditions allowed. They were the most severe encountered since 1963—the most severe weather before then being in 1947.

The penetrating frost between 27 and 30 December caused many parts of plumbing systems within domestic and commercial premises—I stress commercial premises—to freeze. That is not surprising, given the record low temperatures. The consequences were exacerbated by the holiday period. That factor had a marked effect, especially on industrial and commercial premises. Many domestic, commercial and industrial premises were unoccupied, with heating systems set at low levels. In some instances, those systems were switched off.

Commonsense precautions for individuals and businesses could well have had a beneficial effect in reducing some of the problems. The recent mild winters have perhaps lulled people into a false sense of security about severe weather and led them to omit some of the basic steps that I remember were taken in my youth, such as draining systems that might otherwise be unprotected from frost over the holiday closedown.

I can remember that we regularly used to shut down the water supply in the factory. The sprinkler system, which was there to protect against fire by insurance demand, was changed to a compressed air system during frosty weather. Perhaps we have been lulled into forgetting about severe conditions. It is more than 20 years since there have been frosts approaching the severity of those of the recent past.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan referred to a Central Office of Information film, which was produced about 12 years ago. My hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside rightly said that since then conditions have changed significantly, including the insulation of properties, and that the film is no longer in date.

I hope that, when the review body that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has announced comes to consider the lessons that can be learnt, it will take into account specifically communications, and the warnings that can be given to the general public. My right hon. Friend has said that we could seriously consider producing an updated film if the media were to revert to previous practice and regularly showed such films.

Responsibility for emergency planning lies with regional authorities—of that there is little doubt. Throughout the period that we are discussing, however, my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Scottish Office team have been in steady and regular contact, through the emergency planning section in the Scottish Office, with all the local authorities.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland referred to a typical contact that we had with a local authority. We asked the authority whether it needed assistance, and if so what assistance. The military was one option. Throughout, no local authority asked for assistance. I would argue that no authority needed assistance because they were coping so admirably.

Water authorities, of course, have well-established procedures for dealing with burst mains. Generally, authorities mobilised their repair squads quickly as soon as the situation developed, and were usually able to effect repairs to damaged pipes, and restore supply, within 24 hours of a burst being detected.

The authorities' chief concern was the consequences of the massive loss of water through burst pipes, not in their mains but in customers' plumbing systems when the thaw arrived. We know that the thaw was dramatically quick. Overnight flow rates trebled and remained at more than 150 per cent. of normal demand for several days.

Levels in reservoirs, as I heard and saw in Grampian, fell rapidly, and the minimum pressure necessary to maintain supplies to all consumers could not be sustained in some areas. Inevitably, properties in elevated positions, or those at the end of systems or close to a major burst, were most affected.

When I visited the operational headquarters in Grampian, I was told about one industrial leakage that was the equivalent of the normal consumption of about 7,000 houses. That is why the water authorities cut off industrial premises, which were largely closed. When work resumed after the Christmas-new year period, the water supply was restored as quickly as possible. Massive industrial leakages were a major problem for water authorities.

Mr. Salmond: I shall make only one intervention, because time is short. The Minister has conceded that there is a need for a public information film. Media representatives to whom I have spoken have told me that they would be delighted to show such a film, given their experience.

When it comes to insurance, whether it be for councils which were not insured or for individuals, will the Minister tell the House that he will not adopt the argument of the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) and say that nothing can be done because other people were insured? That is not what Scotland would want, given the extremity of the conditions that were faced by everyone over the past few weeks.

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman should have been patient, because I intended to refer to the difficult position of domestic customers.

All the authorities took what steps they could to try to ensure that domestic customers were protected in the first instance. Industry was closed over the relevant period. I emphasise again that emergency planning is a regional council responsibility. The authorities were stretched, but they did not ask for assistance. They were constantly offered it by myself and my ministerial colleagues. The authorities were in the forefront in dealing with the emergency, and I stress that I believe that they performed commendably.

The Government are aware that thousands of Scottish householders in both the public and private sectors have been affected, mainly as a result of burst pipes. Local housing authorities and other agencies responded vigorously, both to the problems in their council houses and by securing temporary accommodation for those made homeless. I am aware that all public sector landlords are working as hard as they can to bring affected houses back into habitable condition as soon as possible, to end the ordeal of those who have had to leave their homes.

[Mr. Kynoch]

Our understanding from initial discussions with some of the authorities affected is that they are currently assessing the damage to their stock, and are unlikely to be able precisely to quantify the costs involved for some time. It is obviously important that they produce quantifiable information. Once that information is available, my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibilities for housing has expressed his willingness to meet the housing committee of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. He has said that he will consider the authorities' problems sympathetically.

For the most part, the cost of repairs to council houses will initially fall to be met from councils' housing revenue accounts. My hon. Friend the Minister with responsibilities for housing took this factor into account in distributing supplementary housing capital allocations totalling £16.8 million last week to 30 housing authorities facing housing capital receipt shortfalls in the current financial year. My hon. Friend is aware of the problems and has been in steady discussions with the authorities.

In due course, some authorities will be reimbursed from insurance, but councils may still be faced with a bill for any excess charges or items not covered by insurance. Housing revenue costs in providing relief and carrying out immediate work fall within the Bellwin scheme, but, as with non-housing expenditure, insurable losses are not covered by the scheme. Housing authorities that consider that they may be eligible for assistance under the Bellwin scheme should quantify the costs involved and contact the Scottish Office as soon as possible.

The Bellwin scheme, as I have said, covers only non-insurable risks. Local authorities can decide to insure or not. If they do not insure, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said recently, they must have a contingency fund.

Mr. Home Robertson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Kynoch: I do not have time to give way to the hon. Gentleman. I wish to take up a few more points before concluding my reply.

Individual tenants and owner-occupiers may have claims against their insurers. As the hon. Member for Shettleston said, some people have difficulty in finding funds to insure. Assistance is available to those in difficult financial circumstances through the Benefits Agency, which has arrangements to cope with such problems. It has been remarkably efficient in dealing with the many claims that it has received.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland asked whether insurance premiums were included in the calculation of benefit levels. I am assured that they are.

As for schools, I have been quoted by several hon. Members, especially the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan. The representatives of one newspaper were not present when I made comments about janitors, yet an article appeared in that newspaper on that topic. I merely posed some questions on the basis of what regional councils should be doing. The response of certain newspapers was particularly galling.

Are the necessary precautions in place so that steps can be taken to try to prevent a recurrence of the circumstances that so recently arose?

Reasonable councils should be taking such steps. I remember that, when I was young, the janitor had the authority—indeed, it was part of his duty—to drain water systems. I do not know whether local authorities still do that. I hope that they will look seriously at that alongside the review that my right hon. Friend has instigated.

We must learn lessons. We have been through a particularly severe cold spell. My right hon. Friend has announced that a review will be carried out by a combination of Scottish Office officials, representatives from Scottish Homes, the new water authorities, an existing water department, a local authority emergency planning function and, indeed, representatives of business—the Confederation of British Industry or the Scottish chambers of commerce.

I believe that all those involved in dealing with this exceptionally difficult time did so admirably well, but it is important, as the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland said, to learn lessons, so that we go forward and do things even better in future.

Driving Tests (Isle of Wight)

12.30 pm

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): If I may, I shall set the background. I am referring in the debate to the new theory test for driving tests. The EC directive 91/439 on driving licences was adopted in July 1991 under article 75 of the European Community treaty. Member states were required to enact any necessary measures for compliance with the directive by 1 July 1994, but the directive itself has to be applied only from 1 July 1995.

The directive requires mutual recognition by member states of driving licences that have been issued by other member states, and allows members to recognise disqualifications for offences that were committed in another state. It also sets minimum standards of competence. That is the aspect that will affect the test and health for drivers.

The directive lists the required competence and the relevant criteria for theoretical knowledge as opposed to the skills element, which is currently covered by a practical test. Drivers are required to be tested on their knowledge of aspects of road safety regulations, the road, other road users, general rules and regulations and the vehicle. There are additional requirements for special categories of vehicle, including motor cycles.

Member states have considerable leeway in how they administer the test to examine candidates on the prescribed areas of competence and knowledge. In the United Kingdom, the practical driving test complies closely with the requirements of the directive, but the theory aspect does not. The wording of the directive says only that the form of the theory test shall be such as to make sure that the applicant has required knowledge of the subjects listed.

At present in the United Kingdom, candidates for the driving test are asked a few oral questions as part of the practical test. The directive itself does not require a written theoretical test, and at first it seemed as though the United Kingdom might implement the theory test requirement simply by expanding the number of questions asked within the present test format. Sadly, however, the decision was taken, yet again, to gold-plate a European directive with the addition of a theory test on its own.

The population of the Isle of Wight is 126,000. Seventy per cent. of households on the island own a motor car. The Isle of Wight has 62,000 registered vehicles, and there are approximately 70 driving instructors in business on the island. The Driving Standards Agency has a driving test centre that employs two full-time examiners. The agency carries out some 3,600 driving tests per year on the island.

With five high schools and a technical college on the island, it is apparent that there are a large number of potential new drivers. The rural nature of large parts of the island makes the ownership of a motor car almost essential. Young people find the process of obtaining a driving licence expensive enough, without the additional expense of having to cross the Solent by ferry to take their theory test.

The Driving Standards Agency put out to tender the examination of the theory test, which is due to start from 1 July. The tender was won by Drive Safe Services Ltd., which, I understand, must provide an examination centre based on population figures from the Department of Transport and cover an approximate 40-mile radius.

Mr. Tony Beere, secretary of the Isle of Wight Driving Instructors Association, telephoned me to say that he had spoken to Mr. Evans of Drive Safe Services Ltd., who had informed him that there was no provision for the theory test to be available on the Isle of Wight, and that it would need the authority of the Driving Standards Agency to provide it. Mr. Beere asked me to contact the Department of Transport to point out to it the problems that that would cause, and to draw its attention to the fact that the Isle of Wight college was prepared to make facilities available for the test.

I understand that Brian Crane, the island's traffic education officer, also offered the facilities at the traffic education centre on behalf of the Isle of Wight council. My hon. Friend the Minister will clearly recognise that there is no shortage of suitable premises and facilities for the theory test on the Isle of Wight.

I telephoned my hon. Friend's office, was promised a call back by a very helpful civil servant, and was told by a member of my hon. Friend's personal staff that the person dealing with the new theory test would telephone me later that day. Sure enough, later that day, 8 January, my office received a telephone call from the person responsible, who was quite adamant that, because the Isle of Wight is within a 40-mile radius of Portsmouth, my constituents would indeed have to travel to the mainland for the theory test from 1 July this year.

I then wrote to my hon. Friend—I also buttonholed him in the Lobby—and told him how concerned I was about the problem. I also asked Madam Speaker for this short debate, so that the record could provide what I hope will be an enduring solution for the people of the island.

On 15 January, I received a faxed copy of a letter from Mr. Steve Madden, the implementation director of Drive Safe Services Ltd., addressed to Mr. Tony Beere, the secretary of the Isle of Wight Driving Instructors Association, in which he says, inter alia:

"You may well be aware that Drive Safe Services Ltd. have now been authorised by the Driving Standards Agency to open an additional test centre on the Isle of Wight. I can confirm then that by 1st July 1996, when the theory test service is delivered to the public, there will be a facility on the Isle of Wight."

The headed notepaper, however, on which that letter came, has no address. It has no company number. It has no list of directors, which makes it an illegal document under EC law. That apart, I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to give me, the young potential drivers and the driving instructors of the Isle of Wight the cast-iron assurances we seek.

My hon. Friend will be aware that Her Majesty's Government have pursued a consistent policy towards the Isle of Wight, to try to ensure that, so far as possible, it has all the facilities and infrastructure that a modern community requires. As recent examples, ministerial decisions have been taken to ensure that services and facilities are not siphoned off to the mainland, thereby causing unnecessary inconvenience and unacceptable additional expense to my constituents, such as the magistrates court service, the island's tax office and the provision of VAT and valuation office inquiries on the island.

My hon. Friend will rapidly appreciate that the Department of Transport has—with the notable exception of my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), who, while a Minister in that Department obtained road

[Mr. Barry Field]

signs on the motorway around Southampton and Portsmouth which gave directions to the Isle of Wight—sadly gained an unenviable reputation for being singularly unhelpful in meeting the islanders' needs and aspirations. Nevertheless, it would fly in the face of consistent Government policy if that impediment were to remain by requiring Isle of Wight residents to travel to the mainland for their theory tests.

There is already a strongly held view on the island that, as the vehicle excise duty is the same as that for the rest of the United Kingdom, there should be some evidence that those of us who do not drive on the mainland should derive at least some advantage from the taxation we pay, rather than the "Road Closed" signs or the corrugations in the road surface that give rise to the famous Isle of Wight rattle.

I can recall a time when, to see a set of traffic lights on the island, learner drivers were taken out to the Yarmouth swing bridge, which had the only set of traffic lights on the island in those days. Things have progressed a little since those times, and we have even made the man with the red flag who walked in front of the motor car redundant. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will appreciate the need to provide the residents of the Isle of Wight with the convenience and accessibility that are available to residents of the rest of the south coast.

I understand that my hon. Friend will not stand at the next election. Let me say with all sincerity—not just for myself, but on behalf of many Back Benchers—that he has earned an enviable reputation as a hard-working Minister who has always tried to provide solutions to problems.

One of my abiding memories is of sitting in the back of a long-wheel-based Range Rover that was reversing up a jungle track in Dominica during a tropical thunderstorm when the temperature was 98 deg F and it was very humid. My hon. Friend—who always endeavours to lower the temperature—displayed his usual aplomb, leading the passengers in a rendition of "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas". The fact that at least three of the passengers were Ministers in the Dominican Government who had never seen a snowflake and were somewhat puzzled, is by the bye.

I have great expectations of this short debate. I think that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to deal with an impediment that has not been resolved by a telephone call from me or by correspondence. Let me put it on the record that, as soon as I drew it to my hon. Friend's attention, he promised a solution. He was very much on my side, seeing the problems that would be posed to Isle of Wight residents who would have to travel to the mainland to take the theory part of their driving tests.

That did not surprise me: when my hon. Friend represented an Oxford constituency, he was one of the first Members of Parliament to speak for me on the Isle of Wight, and I know that he is well aware of the island's problems.

12.41 pm

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): I have seldom had such a pleasant task as that of replying to this debate. I fear that my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) has blown my cover: as far as I can recall—and, for reasons that may be all too apparent, my recollection is somewhat hazy—my hon. Friend had spent much of that day engaging in a serious educational process. As a result, I can now mix a strawberry Daiquiri, and will shortly learn how to spell it. My hon. Friend is clearly a master of his brief, and I am greatly indebted to him.

If you ever travel abroad with my hon. Friend, Madam Deputy Speaker—and I commend it—you will find it a singular experience. My hon. Friend's constituency is unique; he is monarch of all he surveys. If you have the particular good fortune to visit an island whose dimensions are roughly the same as his, you will realise that he can claim virtually to represent the entire process of government. For that reason, my hon. Friend is treated in a way that bears more relation to Napoleonic imperialism than to British parliamentary democracy. It is a heady experience, which ensures that the hospitality that my hon. Friend tends to generate is lavish.

My hon. Friend also carries artefacts on his world tours, with which he blesses various dignitaries: tie pins, badges, ties and all manner of paraphernalia celebrating the island's—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the Minister, but I see little connection between his interesting discourse and the subject in hand.

Mr. Norris: I stand corrected, Madam Deputy Speaker—although I had hoped to convey the special nature of my hon. Friend's constituency, which, after all, led to today's debate.

My hon. Friend wants special recognition of his constituency's particular circumstances, and I welcome the opportunity to reassure him about arrangements for the new theory driving test, which constitutes the most important change to the test since it was introduced 60 years ago. I hope that my hon. Friend will not mind if I do as he did, and begin by describing some of the salient features of the general proposals before responding to his specific constituency point.

On 1 July this year, a new separate theory test will be introduced, which learner drivers will have to pass in addition to the familiar practical test on the road before they can obtain a full licence. The theory test will enable us to meet the new minimum test requirements of the European Community's second directive on driver licensing. My hon. Friend is, however, right in saying that member states will be left with a broad discretion in regard to the arrangement of their driving tests. We aim to secure the maximum road safety benefit from the exercise.

When I examined the subject, along with the then Secretary of State—my right hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney)—we considered the option of simply posing some questions in addition to those that are currently asked at the end of a driving test, which might have satisfied the minimum requirements of the directive. It is important to remember, however, that Britain has the best road safety record in the world, because we take such issues seriously. My right hon. Friend and I discussed how we could use the theory test to expand the awareness and perception that are needed by new drivers in particular.

I am confident that the new theory test—which, incidentally, has the overwhelming support of motoring and road safety organisations—will make a significant

contribution to improving road safety and reducing the accident rate among newly qualified drivers. In that regard, it will also make an important contribution to the achievement of the objectives specified in "The Health of the Nation" White Paper.

The current test is basically sound, but some candidates can pass it without adequate preparation for all aspects of driving. All new drivers need knowledge and understanding if they are to be safe. Drivers in the 17-to-21 age group—which includes most new drivers—constitute 10 per cent. of licence holders, and are involved in 20 per cent. of accidents and 25 per cent. of fatalities. It has been said that a young driver in that category is seven times more likely to be involved in an accident involving injury than a person of my age or that of my hon. Friend—in other words, a person in middle age or, in the case of my hon. Friend, old age.

Let me describe the position more graphically. Road deaths constitute 30 per cent. of all deaths among young people, and 75 per cent. of all accidental deaths in that age group. If we are to go on making our roads safer, we must ensure that the building blocks are right. We must ensure that learner drivers are taught more about observing and anticipating hazards.

I am confident that the theory test will achieve that, and will strengthen the preparations that new drivers make for their driving tests. Because they are likely to take the process more seriously, I expect the pass rate for the practical test—which is currently only about 50 per cent.—to rise.

Obviously, we shall carefully monitor the new test during the first five years, and we shall evaluate it rigorously to make sure that it has the desired effect. If it fails in that respect, we shall certainly be prepared to make appropriate adjustments. The test will last for about 45 minutes, and for cars and motor cycles it will consist of about 35 questions. Motor cyclists will have their own version of the test, with some questions specific to motor cycling.

Most questions will be multiple choice, and will require candidates to choose the correct answer from four possible options. It will also contain some multiple response questions, and candidates will be required to select several answers from five or six options.

As I have said, there will be separate questions for motor cyclists, but each question paper will test about 12 topics, including: driver attitude; traffic signs and regulations; the effects of alcohol, drugs and fatigue on driver behaviour; safety and environmental aspects of vehicles; and so on. Some theory test questions will be picture questions: the pictures might be of road signs or road situations, and a perfectly straightforward question will be asked.

There will be separate tests for learner drivers of lorries, buses and coaches, and they will cover separate topics that are relevant to those licence categories. Each test will consist of 25 multiple choice or multiple response questions.

It is important that the new theory test should discriminate between candidates only on the basis of their knowledge. It is not an intelligence test. The design of the questions and the layout of the papers take special account of the difficulties that people may experience if English is not their first language. The test takes special account of those with dyslexia or other reading difficulties, of the deaf and of people with other disabilities. We have taken some pains to consult all the relevant disability groups to make sure that the arrangements are practicable and as accessible as possible.

Provisions to meet the special needs of candidates will apply irrespective of the category of the theory test that is to be taken. Welsh variations of the test will be available in Wales. Versions of the test using British sign language or a lip speaker will be available for deaf candidates, and facilities will be provided to enable disabled candidates to take the theory test. Where necessary, that could include personal help from a member of staff in filling in the test paper, or perhaps even a test at the candidate's home.

The normal arrangement will be that learner drivers must pass a theory test before they are able to book a practical test. However, during the first six months between 1 July and the end of 1996, there will be a special arrangement to allow test candidates to take the practical test first. To gain a full driving licence, test candidates would need to take the theory test within the following six months. Those measures will help to avoid a bottleneck caused by candidates who cannot book practical tests because they have not passed the theory test. They will also help with the management of any surge in demand for theory tests following the introduction of the new tests.

Irrespective of the order in which the tests are taken, learner drivers will have to pass both the theory and the practical tests before they can drive unaccompanied and before they can be issued with a full driving licence. A programme of publicity has been developed to ensure that learner drivers are properly informed about the new tests well in advance of their introduction. Since September 1995, that has included enclosing with all the provisional licences issued by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency in Swansea a leaflet providing information about the new tests.

The basic information needed to answer the theory test questions is contained in the "Highway Code", and in the Driving Standards Agency book called "The Driving Manual", which is readily available. Additional material to support test candidates is being developed by the DSA and a number of other publishers.

In March, the DSA will publish a book containing all the theory test questions for car and motor cycle learner drivers. The theory test questions for learner drivers of lorries, buses and coaches will be published in early May. As well as providing all the theory test questions and answers, the DSA books will contain text and graphics explaining why the correct answers are right and highlighting aspects of incorrect answer choices.

Before I leave this description of the general arrangements and turn to my hon. Friend's question, perhaps I may be allowed to address myself to young people who are currently contemplating the new test. I should like to do that because I understand from some driving schools and from occasional items in the press that some young candidates are desperate to take the test as soon as they can, so as to get in under the wire before the new arrangements are established.

No driver who is capable of passing the practical test need fear the theory. As I have said, the pass rate for the practical test is currently about 50 per cent. We anticipate that the theory test pass rate will be significantly higher. I urge candidates not to attempt to rush driver training to avoid the theory element.

[Mr. Norris]

I hope that people will have the chance to read what I have said. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight will appreciate it. It is clear that the test will not be arduous. It will provide a full basis for understanding the questions and the answers, and why the answers are right. Therefore, no driver should fear it in any sense. I fear that young drivers who try to get in under the wire are far more likely to experience first-time failure, consequent extra cost and even more delay if they do not approach the subject sensibly and conscientiously. I make it quite plain that the theory test should hold no fears for the competent learner driver.

I now turn to the specific concern of my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight. The specification for the establishment of the theory test and theory test centres was based on responses to DSA customer surveys. Driving test candidates and their instructors thought that it was reasonable in general terms to travel up to 20 miles for a driving test. A national network of theory test centres will be developed and will run frequent test sessions to meet candidates' needs.

The specification for theory test centre locations requires that, for most people, the centre should be available within 20 miles. In towns and cities where the population density is higher, a test centre should be available within about five miles. There might be slight changes in rural areas, where it may be appropriate to go as far as 40 miles, but, in general, we want the test centres to be accessible.

It is precisely on the issue of accessibility that I received a representation from my hon. Friend, and that has led to this short debate. I am extremely grateful to him for paying such a generous tribute to my private office staff, who are absolutely first class. I am glad that they were able to respond so constructively to my hon. Friend.

Following receipt of my hon. Friend's inquiry, I looked into the matter, and confirmed that the initial proposals for test centre locations did not include siting a theory test centre in the Isle of Wight. However, I have considered carefully what my hon. Friend has said on the matter. I know the island, and I enjoyed being there with my hon. Friend for an extremely successful meeting. In the light of his representations, and particularly in the context of the special circumstances on the island, I am happy to confirm to him that I have given directions for an additional theory test centre to be sited on the Isle of Wight.

As my hon. Friend says, practical driving tests for people on the island are provided in Newport, where two examiners are permanently based. If demand requires it, the agency will readily detach additional examiners from Southampton or Portsmouth. As my hon. Friend knows, motor cycle, lorry and bus tests are conducted from a centre at Rookley. That is not a permanently staffed centre, but test programmes are arranged there to fulfil known demand as required. At present, all the agency's target waiting times are being met at the centres—that is, six weeks for cars, four weeks for LGV and PCV vehicles and three weeks for motor cycles.

There have been changes to the DSA's network of booking offices in the past few months. The agency has closed five of its regional offices, including Eastbourne, which used to manage the booking of tests for centres in the Isle of Wight. That work was transferred to the agency's office in Cardiff. There were some initial difficulties there about making contact with the office because of the volume of telephone calls being received, but I am pleased to say that measures to address that have succeeded in improving the situation. As evidence, the booking staff at the office are answering 90 per cent. of all calls within a minute, which is the agency's service standard.

I am glad to have been able to satisfy my hon. Friend that we intend to offer his constituents the standard of service for which he has properly and rightly campaigned on their behalf. I am grateful to him for drawing the matter to my attention and for giving me this opportunity to set matters right. As my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) might have remarked, my hon. Friend has got a result.

Rotherham District General Hospital

12.59 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I make no apology for raising this matter, as experience suggests that hon. Members have an obligation to maintain an interest in agencies and local organisations that serve their constituencies. National health service trusts and other bodies that administer the health service are extremely important in their regions and nationally. Their duties are vital. The funding for which they are responsible is large and needs to be larger. As the taxpayer provides those funds, the Member of Parliament, the taxpayer's representative, is entitled to maintain an interest—indeed, it may be an obligation.

That interest may not always be convenient to, or welcomed by, those bodies, but they need to appreciate that national health service trusts owe their position to the Minister. They are not directly democratically based or clearly representative in their nature—Members of Parliament are. I make the point because, on two or three occasions over the years, my relationship with bodies serving my constituency has not always been smooth and easy. It has usually been cordial, and I have great respect for the people who serve on those bodies. Some years ago, however, one chief officer imagined that he could refuse to meet local Members of Parliament: the Minister will appreciate that the meeting did take place.

Two or three years ago, hon. Members had cause for concern when a project of major importance was not drawn to their attention at a reasonably early stage and the trust's initial response to the public's growing concern was less than sensible. In another matter, I expressed serious concern about the fact that my constituency provided no lay member to serve on Rotherham health authority, an authority of considerable quality, which serves three constituencies: Rother Valley, Rotherham and my own. That was a serious omission. It led me to see the then Health Minister—the present Secretary of State for Health—who, unfortunately, was ill-informed about the position as he said that my constituency did not provide the authority with a lay member before it was reorganised. I was able to give him the relevant names and addresses.

Lest it be suggested that I am wholly critical, I make it clear that I recognise the fact that many of my constituents are justifiably grateful for, and appreciate, the services and help that they have received from the national health service in Rotherham, and that I share their view that the medical, nursing and caring staff at the hospital and in the service generally maintain high standards and show a commendable dedication to their work, which should be consistently recognised. Their position led me to seek this debate. I am not sure that the people responsible for the leadership of the service have adequately recognised their obligation to consider staff and to give proper regard to their views.

I accept that smoking is bad for health—that is beyond dispute. I agree that people, especially the young, should not be encouraged to smoke. I do not quarrel with the efforts of public bodies such as health trusts to discourage smoking and to take steps to protect others from the effects of smoking. Nor do I object to the Department of Health's advice on that matter—that point needs to be made clear from the outset. In effect, this debate is about not smoking, but the conduct of public business and Rotherham trust's approach.

The trust decided to introduce a complete ban on smoking, phasing it in until full implementation on 1 April 1995. That met the wish of Rotherham health authority, which, in compliance with its obligation to the Department, required its providers to operate an anti-smoking policy within Government guidelines. Just before the complete ban came into effect, constituents expressed their concern to me that they were to be prevented from smoking, not only in the hospital but within its grounds and in the car park, including in their motor cars.

On 28 March 1995, I wrote to the trust to express concern about the absolute nature of the ban. The acting chief executive responded promptly to say that the trust had unanimously approved the decision, and he informed me that that was in accordance with Department of Health guidelines. Constituents then said to me that they had been told that the ban had been introduced on the Minister's advice or instructions, so I wrote to the Minister involved—the noble Lady Cumberlege—who replied on 22 April. Her letter referred to the setting aside of a limited number of smoking rooms for staff. That position was significantly different from that of the trust.

National health service guidelines cover the point. They say specifically that a limited number of smoking rooms are to be set aside for members of staff who cannot give up smoking. They assume that all members of staff wish to give up smoking. The Minister who is to reply will accept that not all of them do—it is a free society. The Department asked district health authorities to implement the anti-smoking policy and specific reference was made in the guidelines to the provision of separate smoking rooms for patients and visitors. Rotherham appears to have disregarded that.

Many staff were unhappy about that absolute approach. I understand that the hospital administration department was unhelpful in the drawing up of a petition. The Minister will be aware that more than 500 members of staff at the hospital—500 dedicated and hard-working people—signed a petition seeking the provision of a smoking room. The petition was submitted to the trust and rejected, despite the fact that the Department's guidelines provided for that facility.

Following receipt of the noble Lady's letter, I wrote to the trust and said that the position was anomalous. The noble Lady had advised me that patients could be allowed to smoke if the clinician approved and if the arrangements to allow that had been put in place, and that the facility would be only for patients and not for staff, visitors or anyone else. However, given the number of patients who gather around to smoke outside the hospital, it is peculiar that the trust tells me that facilities have been provided for patients to smoke. If they had, they would not be standing by the hospital doorways in wet and cold weather indulging in the habit.

I wrote to the trust after I had received the noble Lady's letter and waited for a reply. Unfortunately, none came. At a function, I saw the chairman of the trust, a local and distinguished citizen whom I view highly and have known a long time. We still have a cordial relationship. I said that I had not received a reply to my letter. He assured me that the contents of my letter were being taken seriously, but I still did not get a reply.

Like other hon. Members, during recesses I make a number of visits and hold a number of meetings to fulfil my constituency obligations. Following usual practice,

[Mr. Peter Hardy]

a meeting with the trust was arranged for 12 September last year, which my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) and I attended. As soon as the meeting began, I drew attention to the fact that I had not received a reply to my letter and the chairman unhesitatingly offered a full apology. We discussed the problem of the smoking ban in detail. I hoped that, following that meeting, a rather more sensitive approach would be taken. However, within a short time I learnt that the trust had endorsed its existing policy in every particular and again claimed that it was complying with Department of Health policy—which it clearly was not.

I wrote to Baroness Cumberlege again, but I received a reply that I thought was inconsistent with her previous letter. The Minister may disagree about that. Baroness Cumberlege said that she stood by everything that she had stated in her previous letter about the provision of smoking rooms, but she then expressed total support for the trust's decision. I am sure that the Minister has seen the correspondence.

Baroness Cumberlege also referred to the claim that the vast majority of patients, staff and visitors wholeheartedly supported the trust's policy. I have very real doubts about that—514 members of staff requesting a different arrangement can hardly be described as overwhelming support. As far as I know, the trust has made no attempt to discover whether it actually does have the overwhelming support of the community, patients and visitors. Indeed, as far as I am aware, the only exercise to establish that was carried out by members of staff. It revealed that the majority of people who do not smoke as well as the overwhelming majority of people who do smoke disagreed with the trust's policy. That clearly shows that the trust's claim that its policy enjoys overwhelming support is not well founded.

I am concerned about people who visit the hospital and use their own cars. Despite the enormous successes of hospitals in modern times, they remain places of stress. To add additional stress by refusing to allow any opportunity to smoke is not necessarily wise. It is also rather oppressive to tell people that they cannot smoke in their own cars. I pointed out to the trust last September that it would face wholesale disregard of its ban. South Yorkshire is not the sort of area where big brother immediately and automatically commands obedience and respect. I told the trust that docile, obedient, responsible citizens would obey the ban, but a very large number of people would not, which would make those who respected the ban feel somewhat angry and embittered. The ban does not help to foster good relationships. It is much too oppressive to tell people that they cannot smoke in their own cars.

There has been a slight advance because the chairman has now told me that the trust will not enforce the ban. I am not happy about that because I believe that regulations should be sensible and enforceable. If they are not, they should not have been made. I hope that there will be a different approach.

The Department of Health is responsible for the trust and it appoints its members. It has issued guidance to which I do not object and nor do the majority of people and the staff of Rotherham hospital. However, the trust, which does not have a democratic mandate, has chosen to disregard the staff and impose a ban. That places a burden on staff, one of whom is a constituent of mine who has not had a day off work for health reasons in 20 years. She is now told that she cannot smoke within the precincts of the hospital.

The trust feels entitled to disregard the Department's advice on the provision of smoking rooms. It is distasteful that the trust, having decided to differ from the Department's advice, has not acknowledged that difference but instead claimed, both before and after the ban and during our meeting, that its action was in accordance with departmental advice. Will the Minister make it clear to the trust that it should not say that it is following ministerial instructions when it is not?

We are concerned here not with the merits or demerits of smoking but with the proper conduct of public business. Perhaps it would be appropriate for the Minister to confirm that trusts should always be willing to meet Members of Parliament and that they should never mislead them. Hon. Members are entitled to be, and must be, given accurate information by all the public bodies that serve their constituents. In this case, I do not think that I was given accurate information. Neither do I think that the trust recognised its obligations to the community and to its parliamentary representatives.

The dedicated and caring staff of Rotherham hospital should have received adequate information. I am not sure whether it is correct, but I have been told by several members of staff that they were not properly consulted. The Minister will acknowledge that departmental advice makes it absolutely clear that staff should be consulted. In this case, I have a real suspicion that they were not. I hope that there will not again be the same insensitive disregard of the views of staff that has clearly been the case until now. I hope that there will be an understanding that sometimes a draconian attitude can be counter-productive.

As I said earlier, when I have driven around the hospital area, I have been surprised by the number of people smoking. Not long ago, someone counted 250 cigarette ends by the front door. That shows that a hard and insensitive approach does not produce the desired result. I suspect that more tobacco has been consumed in and around the hospital since the ban than was ever the case before. Many people, including myself, would not smoke in the hospital when attending meetings and so on. However, as I was leaving after my last visit, I noticed that a great number of people were smoking. Therefore, the trust might wish to consider whether its policy is wise. Coercion should always be avoided and the views of the staff should be more carefully considered.

The matter was fully discussed at the recent annual meeting of the hospital trust. I was concerned to hear that when someone who attended the meeting asked to see the minutes, he was told that legal opinion was being sought on whether they could be shown to him. The trust should recognise that we are still living in a democracy. I hope that democracy will play a larger part in its future consideration of such matters.

1.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam): I am glad to have the opportunity to respond to the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), who raised some important points. I have always respected his talents as an implacable pursuer of

causes that are dear to his heart—which certainly include bodies that are not democratically elected. Indeed, he is quite right to point out that it is precisely the function of Members of Parliament, who are democratically elected, to raise such matters. Incidentally, I am also glad to note that he paid particular tribute to the staff of Rotherham district general hospital, and I would like to associate myself with that tribute.

I understand that this debate is not so much about smoking policy or anti-smoking policy per se, but about what the hon. Member for Wentworth called the proper conduct of public business—in this case the conduct of the trust. None the less, before coming to that matter, I shall briefly comment on Government policy on smoking, since it was the origin of the problem.

The Government believe that people are entitled to breathe air unpolluted by tobacco smoke and that non-smoking should be the norm in buildings frequented by the public, with special provision for smoking where local managers feel that it is appropriate. National health service premises are required to be virtually smoke-free. Smoking is responsible for about 110,000 premature deaths in the United Kingdom each year, and the treatment of smoking-related diseases costs the NHS, and therefore the taxpayer, about £610 million a year.

As the largest employer in the United Kingdom, and as the manager of premises used by thousands of members of the public, the NHS has a responsibility to protect patients, visitors and staff from the health risks of smoking. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman would disagree with that. The NHS, precisely because it is the NHS, should and does develop an exemplary role, leading the way and providing the model for other employers to follow.

In July 1992, the White Paper "The Health of the Nation" set out a requirement for the NHS to work towards a virtually smoke-free environment for staff, patients and visitors as rapidly as possible. Soon after that, guidance was issued in October 1992, to which the hon. Gentleman has referred, which set out the action required of NHS hospitals and authorities. That guidance is called "Towards Smoke-Free NHS Premises".

The Department co-operated with the Health Education Authority in the production and distribution of guidance on the design and implementation of smoking policies. That publication set out the basic requirements of an NHS policy, but left management free to tailor arrangements to suit local circumstances. Advice was also included on the responsibility of health authorities to specify that, wherever possible, NHS services should be provided in a smoke-free atmosphere.

It is worth remembering that the Government guidance issued to help implementation of that policy does not require hospitals to provide separate smoking facilities for staff and patients. It sets a minimum standard, which all parts of the NHS are expected to achieve. It is up to local managers—I emphasise that—to decide whether they feel that it is necessary or practicable to set aside such smoking rooms for staff and/or patients.

Following receipt of the Department of Health guidance, the Rotherham General Hospitals NHS trust set up a task group in 1993 to look at the question. On 4 October 1993, it sent out a letter, which was—to use the bureaucratic terminology—cascaded to staff via the team-brief network, and a policy statement, which I think that the hon. Gentleman has seen, setting out its position on anti-smoking policy. The letter asked for comments or questions by the end of December of that year. The consultation lasted for three months from the beginning of October to the end of December 1993. I am told—the hon. Member for Wentworth has not controverted this—that only two members of staff individually made representations during that three-month period.

The first stage of the policy, which was issued to staff—I understand—in a letter with their pay packets, was implemented on 1 April 1994. It made it plain that to help staff, a smoking room would be set aside until 1 April 1995, after which—two years after the beginning of the process—the whole policy would come into force. That is the burden of the problem raised by the hon. Member for Wentworth.

I am also aware that in February 1995, a 500-name staff petition against banning smoking was considered by the trust board. I should point out that although the hon. Member for Wentworth said that the petition received substantial support, the trust employs 3,000 staff and the petition therefore represents quite a small proportion of employees—fewer than one in five.

Mr. Hardy: I am sure that there would have been a much larger response to the petition had the people responsible for it been allowed to put a notice on the staff notice board and the administration had not been especially discouraging. Many staff work strange hours, including night shifts, and so on, and I am assured by those responsible for the petition that many more signatures would have been obtained had it been simple to do so.

Mr. Horam: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but I can obviously go only on the facts in front of me.

Since April 1995, when its policy was introduced, the trust, which treats about 300,000 patients a year, has received only three formal complaints from patients about its smoking policy.

I shall deal with the effect on patients before I deal with the effect on staff. The trust decided to allow discretion for clinicians to designate smoking areas for wards where certain patients are allowed to smoke. Long-stay patients who are addicted to smoking are allowed to smoke, as are terminally ill patients, where the medical staff in charge of their care feel that it is in the patients' best interests. The trust is considering offering free nicotine patches to all in-patients for use during their stay. I am aware from the correspondence that some patients do indeed go outside the building to smoke, but they do so against medical and nursing advice. I stress to the hon. Member for Wentworth that about 500 deaths a year in Rotherham are attributed to smoking—that is one in five.

I understand that some staff reacted strongly when the trust removed the designated smoking room, although ample notice was given in the course of the procedure that I have described, and proper consultation was conducted. As the hon. Member for Wentworth has pointed out, the trust has adopted a lenient approach to staff smoking in hospital grounds. Although the trust cannot of course forbid smoking in private cars—that would be quite oppressive, to use the hon. Gentleman's word—it has every right to forbid smoking in its own vehicles.

The hon. Member for Wentworth kindly wrote to me on 13 January, raising a number of points related to the debate. He said:

[Mr. Horam]

"I do not entirely disagree with your comments about smoking. However, your letter overlooks several of the matters which I have raised.

The NHS guidelines do refer to the provision of smoking rooms. Rotherham has refused to provide these."

Simply, my point is that that is a matter for local decision. It is a matter for the Rotherham General Hospitals NHS trust and it is not therefore in conflict with Government policy. It is simply exercising its right to carry it a step further than the Government guidance suggests.

The hon. Member for Wentworth also asked whether the Department knew about the 500-name petition. It is not clear from the chain of documentation whether we were fully aware of it. As far as my noble Friend Lady Cumberlege could determine from all the evidence, we were, however, fully aware that there was not a majority in favour of reversing the ban imposed by the trust. We have discussed the figures and the hon. Gentleman has made his point. None the less, the petition contained only about 500 signatures, and there are 3,000 employees of the trust.

The hon. Member for Wentworth went on to ask what arrangements had been made to enable patients to smoke where a clinician agreed that they should be able to do so. That is an important and practical point. An arrangement may be made between staff and a patient so that he or she may smoke at agreed times, for example after meals. In such a case, a single room off the main ward may be made available or a sister's office can be allocated for that purpose by agreement with staff. The trust has made it clear that there are no spare rooms and no specific rooms are designated for smoking.

The hon. Gentleman finally raised the question of smoking out of doors and in cars. I take his point that a general ban was imposed at first. However, in the light of experience and, perhaps, common sense, the trust now operates that aspect of the policy leniently.

All those matters were raised again by the acting chief executive and by the non-smoking policy group just before Christmas—in October or November—and the trust board considered them at its meeting in December. Various recommendations were made—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order.

A12 (Waveney)

1.30 pm

Mr. David Porter (Waveney): I am grateful for this opportunity to raise the matter of the A12 trunk road in Waveney and to express some of my constituents' fears about the consequences of leaving it as it is, without development and without significant improvement.

When the roads programme was cut in the previous Budget, it was understood that all road schemes had to be reconsidered; no one argues against that. My hon. Friend the Minister for Railways and Roads and the Department of Transport can only do what they can with the money that the Treasury gives them. It is also now unfashionable in some quarters to build roads.

I hope, however, that my hon. Friend will understand the sense of betrayal and desertion that I feel on behalf of my constituents as a result of the fact that the commitment in the White Paper "Roads for Prosperity" to dual the A12 from London to Great Yarmouth by 1999 has been abandoned in the re-ordering of priorities. Such schemes are abandoned without hope when they are wiped out for ever instead of being put back. Putting back is not satisfactory, but expectation and community feeling are kept alive. Axing completely simply demoralises individuals, businesses and communities that trusted in that original hope.

I shall concentrate on two parts of the A12. The first is the A12 through Wrentham, an attractive village whose case for a bypass was established and settled many years ago, when the Department of Transport kept the A12 north of Ipswich as a trunk road and took over the Wrentham bypass scheme from Suffolk county council. On 27 November last, a child, Grace Wright, was almost killed crossing the A12 after school at 4.30 in the afternoon. By a miracle and as a result of intensive care in Addenbrooke's hospital, she is now recovering. There may be some traffic-calming measures, and there may be traffic controls and further speed restrictions, but what does it take to happen—how many lives will be put at risk—before a bypass, which was accepted when traffic volumes were lower than they are now, is built on road safety, environmental and quality of life grounds?

Surely when the Kessingland bypass was built, the Wrentham bypass should have been added to it. Having delayed the scheme with inquiries and arguments over routes, surely the most sensitive decision would have been to keep it in the active programme. Whatever the arguments about the stretch through Lowestoft, which I shall come to next, surely Wrentham was a stand-alone case with a watertight justification. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to reinstate the scheme to a higher priority as so much money has already been spent on its preparation.

In Lowestoft, to the north of Wrentham, there is an even worse case. The Government have simply wiped out the spine road from Kessingland to Pleasurewood, roads on both sides of the river and the bridge that crosses Lake Lothing. The campaign for a third crossing at Lake Lothing began at the end of the first world war in 1918 and some of the approach corridors have been preserved since the mid-1960s. The two existing crossings, the crossing at Mutfordlock in Oulton Broad and the bascule bridge in Lowestoft harbour, have been variously replaced over the years. The Mutfordlock crossing was rebuilt most recently, but it is not a trunk road.

The existing bascule bridge is the only main link for the two halves of Lowestoft and beyond in either direction. To the north, there is Great Yarmouth where hundreds of my constituents travel to work. To the south, there are Ipswich, London and the channel tunnel. The bridge also provides a link to the A14 east-west link. That bridge is thus central and critical.

The bascule bridge is coming towards the end of its life. The previous bridge failed and for weeks, the town was cut in half. Business, cultural and social life almost died. The replacement was built in 1972 with an expected life span of 30 years, so we are only six years from its expected end, with no replacement in hand. Last summer, the bridge failed during a peak bank holiday period. The tailbacks were horrendous and life was literally rendered intolerable for thousands of people. I keep asking what plans the Government have in the event of permanent failure of that bridge. The answer seems to be that they have none. I ask again today what my hon. Friend will do if the bridge fails beyond repair.

In February 1991, I corresponded with Christopher Chope, who was then Minister for Roads and Traffic, about failures of the bridge in November 1990 and January 1991—failures of the same chaotic magnitude as last summer's. He replied:

"In November 1990 my Department announced the preferred route for the A12 Lowestoft Relief Road which incorporates a new crossing in the vicinity of the North Quay. Subject to completion of statutory procedures and the availability of funds construction could start in 1994 and would take about two years . . . I hope that we can avoid further failures of this kind but recognise that the long-term solution is the construction of a new harbour crossing."

Nothing has changed since then except that the traffic volume, the pollution and the inconvenience have got worse. The need is still there.

Even when the bridge is working properly, it causes problems. It opens to shipping, on average, 12 times a day. Each opening takes three to four minutes although if there is more than one vessel to go through, openings can take 10 minutes or more. Average tailbacks of traffic at bridge openings are three quarters of a mile in both directions. The hundreds of stationary vehicles often keep their engines running throughout.

Of course the bridge openings are vital to the economic well-being of the port and no one suggests that the bridge should not be opened. The area is trying to encourage tourists and there is a growing Dutch visitor element. Those Dutch visitors, who are, in effect, our competitors in Europe, are astonished that a town the size of Lowestoft, with 65,000 people, has to hold its breath and hope that the bridge, having opened, will close again to allow the vehicles across. In Holland, there is no question of bridges not working or not being replaced because they are a priority in keeping commerce going.

What other town of Lowestoft's size and importance—it is the second largest in Suffolk—has to have a trunk road going through its heart while being 80 miles from the nearest point of the motorway network? In the north of the town, the A12 is reduced to a single lane in several places although it carries more than 33,000 vehicles a day. In the south, where London road south runs through the Kirkley area, exhaust fumes were monitored last summer, with ghastly findings. The incidence of asthma around that part of the A12 is twice the frequency for Lowestoft in general, which is itself higher than the national average. Drawing trunk traffic flow from those areas into the corridors that have been preserved is the only solution.

If there is any doubt, we need look no further than the circular, sent out every year by the Department of Transport, which advises local authorities on how to prepare their transport policies and programmes. The local authorities—I quote from instruction 25—are told:

"Authorities should pay particular attention to air quality in preparing transport plans especially through consideration of measures to reduce traffic levels in sensitive areas such as town centres."

What is good enough advice for local authorities should be good enough advice for the Department of Transport.

What of the corridors, the houses and the land that have been blighted and bought with taxpayers' money? Whole housing developments and minor roads have been built over the years which leave the A12 spine road corridors. Are the corridors to be allowed to go to development—ribbon and odd-corner development—just because the spine road has been arbitrarily axed?

I was born and brought up in Lowestoft. For all my life—certainly all my political life—Lowestoft's traffic problems have been beyond any joke. There is an all-party consensus on the need for a bridge. There is agreement from industry and business, from the elderly and from young families that the third crossing is the solution. We call it the third crossing; the Department of Transport calls it the second crossing, implying that the bascule bridge will eventually go and that the new bridge will be built west of the inner harbour. Such joke as there was, was that the second coming would occur before the third crossing. As things stand now, that may well be so.

Those who did not want the new bridge are happy now. Some argued that the spine road was not a panacea and would encourage yet more vehicular traffic. There are those—I am certainly among them—who say, "If we cannot have a £80 million bridge up river, what can we have? What do we as a community want from our road layout which will improve the quality of our lives and our economic prospects?"

While we have been given a chance to rethink, there is a fear that nothing at all will be done to help Lowestoft solve its economic problems, which are being experienced deeply by many of my constituents. In recent years, Lowestoft has suffered a decline in its traditional industries, and jobs lost in food-related industries, shipbuilding and fishing have put local unemployment at about 11 per cent.

The existing A12 links are at best sub-standard and at worst wholly inadequate, given the economic pressures on the area. The area failed to get assisted area status, although nearby Great Yarmouth did. If the decision had been made a few weeks later, unemployment in Lowestoft would have been high enough to allow us to get assisted area status also. Lowestoft has been designated an EU objective 5b area, but so far we have not received approval for any big job creation ideas. That approval must come from the Government via the Government office for the eastern region, which includes my hon. Friend the Minister's Department.

Eighteen months ago, European Commission official Alfonso Gonzalez Finat visited Lowestoft and was shown the potential of the port. He pointed out that the road links create an unfair disadvantage for a port with such

[Mr. David Porter]

excellent European sea links. In 1980, a British Road Federation report criticised the state of all road links to ports, and singled out Lowestoft. Since then, nothing has been done except for one small piece of work—the eastern relief road from the port. Despite that, a single carriageway trunk road still goes through the heart of the town. The relief road funnels the traffic instead of moving it. When the bridge is open, the eastern relief road is no more than an expensive temporary car park.

The promise of road improvements has helped investment in Lowestoft to some degree, but now that the hope following the 1989 promise has been removed, we fear relocations and closures. There is a feeling in East Anglia that the central corridor of Great Britain from the north through the middle of England and London to the channel tunnel is being developed. That is fair enough, and I will not argue with that. But as a consequence, the furthest edge of East Anglia is being sidelined. I hope that that is not being done deliberately, but that appears to be the case.

People often say to me that the charm of an isolated area such as north Suffolk is what brings in the tourists, and that is true. The Broads and the North sea are great natural assets that attract visitors, while the local bathing beaches are the finest in England. North Suffolk is one of the most appealing parts of the country. There are people who visit the area regularly for many years, and some end up retiring there. But a thriving tourist industry based on water, entertainment, history and indigenous charm must be accessible. There must be a thriving local economy, and not one that is simply choked by traffic.

We were awarded objective 5b status to ameliorate the deficiency in our communications and infrastructure that adversely affects local businesses and communities and which erects barriers preventing sustainable development. The A12 at Waveney is surely a classic candidate for priority treatment under that criterion.

Where do we go from here? What is to happen to the Wrentham bypass, the spine road and the bridge? What schemes is the Department of Transport now looking at to ease Lowestoft's traffic problems? What will happen when—not if—the bascule bridge fails for good? What plans has the Department made in the event of the bridge failing for a few days, weeks or months? Will a replacement be provided for that crossing?

Why can we not build a bridge at the proposed crossing place, but under the private finance initiative? There is surely scope there for such a development. Will my hon. Friend undertake to look at that proposal urgently? At the end of last year, the Government were considering dividing the road network into 27 regions, controlled by a corporation set up to extend, run and maintain the road system. Drivers would have to pay companies by electronic metering, zone permits or a fuel levy to use the roads, in return for the scrapping of the £140 vehicle excise duty. That would mean that all of the money raised for roads would be spent on roads. Is that the answer for the A12 and for other roads? If not, what is the answer? What can I take back to my constituents, who have been deeply affected by the change in the economic base in the past decade? With their great hopes of investment in the area's infrastructure from taxpayers wiped out—at least for now—what can I take back to my constituents?

1.43 pm

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Porter) on securing the debate. I know from many recent discussions with my hon. Friend of his concern at the lack of progress on work on the A12 in Waveney, and the Kessingland to Pleasurewood improvement and bridge in particular.

A combination of sharply rising road construction costs and reduced funds in the public expenditure settlement necessitated a review of the trunk road programme, as my hon. Friend has acknowledged. As part of the announcements at the time of the Budget in November, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport announced the "Managing the Trunk Road Programme" review, which had looked at the whole national programme. The revised programme represents a practical assessment of what can realistically be achieved within the resources likely to be available.

We have targeted the new programme at key routes, while seeking to make the best possible use of the network. The new programme includes a significant number of bypasses, but many very desirable and strongly supported schemes have had to be deferred or withdrawn altogether. Within East Anglia, our main priorities are the A14 and the M11-A11. It was recognised in the review that the A12 and A140 between Ipswich, Lowestoft and Norwich were of lower priority in national terms. I accept, however, that they may be very important locally.

We have withdrawn all schemes on the A140, but on the A12 north of Ipswich we have retained the following four schemes in the longer-term programme—Martlesham to Wickham Market, Wickham Market to Saxmundham, the Yoxford bypass and the Wrentham bypass, to which my hon. Friend referred. These have been retained in the longer-term programme primarily because of the environmental benefits they will bring.

In Waveney, three of the original schemes on the A12 fall within the boundary of the district council. The bypass for Blythburgh was withdrawn from the programme because of its serious effect on the local environment. It would have passed through an area of outstanding natural beauty, and close to a Ramsar site and a site of special scientific interest.

The scheme that combined the Kessingland to Pakefield improvements and the Lowestoft relief road—and, as my hon. Friend has explained, would have included a third crossing of Lake Lothing—has been withdrawn. I know that there is strong local support for it, and I sympathise with the view which my hon. Friend has expressed today that the economic development of Lowestoft is being constrained by poor links to the national road network and congestion in the town. The scheme would be very expensive, however, and the bridge is a particularly costly element within it. The scheme would cater mainly for local traffic.

The decision to withdraw the scheme was a difficult one in the light of local needs. My hon. Friend and I have previously discussed arguments advanced by local authorities—he advanced these arguments again today—that the bridge element of the scheme could be considered a candidate for a design, build, finance and operate project. But although the private sector would fund the work within a DBFO contract, an arrangement based on shadow tolling would still place a burden on the

Department's public expenditure budget. Faced with tight limits on expenditure for highways infrastructure, a third harbour crossing for Lowestoft could not be regarded as a high priority for investment in national terms. Any further developments of DBFOs will be targeted towards schemes that are of sufficient national importance to be included within the main road programme.

My hon. Friend mentioned his concerns about the bridge itself. I hope that I can assure him that a structural assessment and detailed inspection of the bridge completed recently has shown that it is in generally good condition. However, it is likely that some further inspections and testing will take place later this year, together with other minor maintenance works.

The lifting bridge is operated by Associated British Ports, which also oversees the maintenance of the mechanical and electrical systems on behalf of the Highways Agency. The structure of the bridge itself is maintained by the county council as agents of the Highways Agency. A detailed programme of routine maintenance is managed by ABP, which continues throughout the year. This involves day-to-day servicing of the operating systems, as well as a replacement and refurbishment of major components on a regular basis.

I hope that I can reassure my hon. Friend that the bridge is in generally sound condition and should continue to operate satisfactorily for many more years. I acknowledge his point that we must look far enough ahead to take account of what might be required in terms of substantial refurbishment or, perhaps, replacement of the bridge.

We consulted the public on the proposed Wrentham bypass in the summer of 1993. I realise how frustrating a further delay in that scheme must be, particularly for those who live alongside the existing trunk road. As I explained earlier, the A12 is not one of the nation's most important routes, and we have not yet been able to find a place for the bypass in the main programme. The scheme has not been abandoned but placed in the longer-term category, which means that we shall take it forward as we make progress with the main programme.

I cannot give any promises now as to when the scheme might be brought into the main programme because it will depend on our progress and resources during the next few years. In the meantime, work on the scheme will be suspended. In the near future we shall make an announcement locally about how matters rest following the 1993 consultation.

Where we have withdrawn major schemes or we are unable to make rapid progress with them in the foreseeable future, as a matter of course we shall consider whether more limited improvements to the existing roads can be implemented to improve safety and ease congestion.

Recent improvements to the A12 include work on the Lowestoft eastern relief road, which forms part of the one-way trunk road system north of the harbour, and was completed in 1994. That scheme was funded by the Department of Transport using a 100 per cent. grant under section 272 of the Highways Act 1980 and incorporated into the network on completion.

The new road is expected to boost the local economy by improving access to the town's industrial areas and docks. In addition, the scheme has removed some 7,500 vehicles a day from Lowestoft's Triangle market shopping area. The local environment also benefits from reduced congestion and lower vehicle emissions—a point which my hon. Friend stressed.

The Department of Transport has carried out a programme of local improvements along the A12 corridor. Those include signing, road markings, junction modifications and improved facilities for pedestrians and cyclists.

A study has been carried out on the existing A12 corridor through Lowestoft, and a package of improvements has been identified, which includes changes to the one-way system, the introduction of a bus lane, changes to signal controls, junction improvements, signing, road markings, and waiting and loading restrictions. The package is designed to ease congestion and improve safety, and individual elements can be implemented to suit the level of any future funding allocation. Preliminary consultations have been carried out in order to draw up the proposals, but a more detailed consultation exercise will be necessary prior to implementation.

North of Lowestoft, a scheme is being prepared for the installation of central reserve safety fencing on the one and three quarter-mile length of dual carriageway north of Lowestoft. That will complete the installation programme for the county and assist in the overall installation target for the whole country by the end of 1996.

At Kessingland bypass southern roundabout, a scheme has been prepared to improve the existing layout in order to reduce the high number of overrun accidents. Contract documents have been approved, and the scheme is ready to go out to tender when funds become available.

A scheme has been prepared to install a right-turn lane at the A12 Benacre junction in order to reduce turning accidents. Contract documents have been prepared, and negotiations for land acquisition are under way. When that has been completed, the scheme will be ready to go out to tender when we can make funds available.

A scheme is also being prepared to improve the Wangford junction in order to reduce accidents. There is also a scheme to close one leg of the Wangford junction crossroads, where there is poor visibility, in order to reduce accidents.

A study has been carried out into the provision and standard of laybys on the A12, which has identified a further package of improvements along the route. It is intended that a rolling programme of improvements should be drawn up to suit the available funds.

I mentioned an investigation to identify improved facilities for cyclists along the route, not that we have forgotten the needs of pedestrians as well. A further scheme to reduce accidents along the A12 seeks to improve the conspicuity of junctions and implement other local low-cost measures.

We must look further than the A12. The other major route serving Lowestoft is via the A143 and A146 from the A14 at Bury St. Edmunds. The Government have provided considerable grant support for the Norfolk and Suffolk county council schemes to upgrade that route. In the past two years alone, support has been given for the Scole-Stuston bypass, the Brockdish-Needham bypass and the Rickinghall-Bottesdale bypass, all of which are now open to traffic.

[Mr. John Watts]

We also continue to maintain the existing routes, and we have completed three schemes this year within the Waveney district. We have undertaken resurfacing work at Kirkley Cliff, at a cost of £25,000, resurfacing and reconstruction work at Waveney road, at a cost of £98,000, and resurfacing at Denmark road, which has cost £30,000. We propose to undertake further maintenance next year, including the resurfacing at Battery Green road and resurfacing at Sparrows Nest, at a combined cost of £186,000. I hope that that shows our commitment to a realistic programme of improvements to the strategic routes serving Waveney on trunk and county primary roads.

I said at the beginning of my speech that it was vital that priorities were set within a realistic financial framework. We have done that in a responsible manner, concentrating our efforts on the key national routes.

In East Anglia, the most important road project in recent years was the A14, which was opened in 1994. It is a dual carriageway trunk road from the Ml-M6 junction to Felixstowe, and it is regarded as one of the key strategic routes for the region. We have six schemes for capacity and safety improvements in the programme for that route. As part of the Ireland-UK-Benelux road, it is one of the 14 Christophersen priority projects for the European Community and therefore eligible for some funding from the trans-European networks budget. The A14, as I mentioned earlier, serves the needs of Lowestoft via the link at Bury St. Edmunds.

Our next priority is the M11-A11 route from London to Norwich. That priority appears to be widely accepted in the region as the key route to Norwich and the coast. We are making great strides with the dualling of the A11 from south of Cambridge, with eight of the 12 schemes already opened—I opened one scheme only a month ago—and the Besthorpe-Wymondham scheme to open later this year. That will leave us with only three schemes, all of which are retained in the main programme.

The Roudham Heath-Attleborough improvement is ready to start when funds become available. It is our firm intention to complete the dualling of the A11 from the M11 to Norwich.

On our third priority, the A47, we have spent some £150 million in recent years, on the schemes in Cambridgeshire and Norfolk, between the A1 at Peterborough and Great Yarmouth; including the Norwich southern bypass, which has considerably improved travel to the coastal towns of Great Yarmouth and, to some degree, Lowestoft. There are further A47 schemes in the main and longer-term programme, but I recognise that the long-cherished hope of many businesses and authorities for a complete dual carriageway route will not be forthcoming.

I know that my hon. Friend would like more by way of future intentions and improvements to the A12, but we have carried out a thorough review of the roads programme and put into the main programme a number of types of schemes which we think that we can deliver within the funding that we believe will be available over the next few years. We have identified for the longer-term programme schemes which we still believe will be needed at some time in the future, but which are not of sufficient priority to be taken forward immediately. It would not have been responsible of us not to recognise that, beyond those two elements of the programme, there are other schemes of which the possibility of being delivered is so far into the future that it would not be reasonable to continue to impose the blight which attaches to schemes in the programme, even if they are many years ahead.

To have kept schemes in the long-term programme which we know we have very little realistic opportunity to deliver would be to con people. I know that my hon. Friend would not want me—I know that he would never do it—to excite expectations which could not be realised among his constituents. I shall continue to reflect on what he has said, and to pay close attention to the bridge and the measures necessary to keep it available as a vital link on the A12 and within the town of Lowestoft, so that some of the problems which have been experienced in recent months will not be repeated.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

North Channel Gas Pipeline

1. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent consideration he has given to the representations he has received concerning the British Gas pipeline in the north channel. [7885]

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Ian Lang): I am kept fully informed of developments on this issue and my Department, with others, continues to consider all representations.

Mr. Foulkes: Is the President of the Board of Trade aware, however, that last night BBC Scotland showed a video, made before the pipeline was laid, revealing extremely dangerous munitions on the route of the pipeline, which explains why the Ministry of Defence opposed that route from the start? Will the right hon. Gentleman explain to the House exactly what requirements will be made of British Gas before the pipeline is commissioned so that ferry passengers, fishermen, submariners and, above all, my constituents can be assured that there are no further dangers from the munitions and from the gas pipeline?

Mr. Lang: I can assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that safety will be the predominant consideration before the pipeline is licensed for use. As the hon. Gentleman knows, following the survey carried out last November a further survey is now in contemplation. I have no doubt that the Health and Safety Executive will want to be fully satisfied of the safety of the pipeline before it is authorised.

Mr. Beggs: What assurance can the Secretary of State give to potential consumers in Northern Ireland that gas will flow and that there will be secure supplies to Northern Ireland?

Mr. Lang: That is the objective of laying the pipeline. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would be the first to agree that safety considerations must be satisfied before the use of the pipeline is authorised. I acknowledge that one advantage of converting Ballylumfort power station from crude oil to gas will be more competitive electricity generation prices. The conversion will also have the environmental benefit of reducing the acid rain emissions affecting south-west Scotland.

Mr. Salmond: The President of the Board of Trade used to be Secretary of State for Scotland, and he has been a Member of Parliament for 17 years in south-west Scotland. Why has he said and done so little about the munitions that were dumped off the south-west coast of Scotland and the resulting huge environmental problems? Will he explain to the House why the assurances that he gave to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) today should be given any more credibility than the assurances given in the past, which have proved worse than useless under examination?

Mr. Lang: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is reassured by the provisional findings of the survey carried out in November as a direct result of the anxieties that were expressed about the munitions, which came to light because of the laying of the pipeline. Although the samples and findings are subject to final analysis, the preliminary conclusions are that there is no danger to the food chain and no pollution problem, and that the pipeline will be satisfactory once all the health and safety considerations have been addressed.

Export Levels

2. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the current level of United Kingdom exports to the European Union, to north America and to the rest of the world. [7886]

Mr. Lang: In the year to October 1995, UK visible exports to the European Union were worth £88 billion. In the year to November 1995, exports to north America were valued at £20 billion, while the rest of the world accounted for £42 billion.

Mr. Pawsey: I am grateful for that full reply, especially as it emphasises the success of British exporters compared with that of our principal competitors in the European Union. To what extent would that success be jeopardised if the social chapter were introduced to the United Kingdom, as Opposition Members would like, and what would be the implications for British jobs?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the dangers of signing on for the social chapter, in accordance with Labour party policy. One of the great competitive advantages that the British economy undoubtedly enjoys is the flexibility of our labour market and our relatively low non-wage costs. Although average production worker take-home pay is higher than in most countries in Europe, and equal to that in Germany, non-wage additional labour costs are much lower in the United Kingdom than elsewhere. That is what gives us our competitive advantage, enabling our exports to do so well.

Mrs. Beckett: Surely a Government who claim to understand business recognise that no business and no country ever prospers by giving its attention solely to one side of the balance sheet and ignoring the whole picture. Although we all welcome the strength of British exports, surely the Secretary of State does not deny that our problem is that imports to this country have risen even faster. As a result, we still have a trade deficit, not just with the rest of Europe, including France and Germany, but with north America and the rest of the world. Do the Government not recognise that those continuing problems will never be resolved unless we engage in and press for a great united national effort of the kind that the Labour party is urging on the country?

Mr. Lang: The right hon. Lady will be aware that many imports come to this country in a semi-manufactured state to be converted into fully manufactured exports, so the increased economic activity represented by imports is also reflected in these record-breaking export figures. The leader of the Labour party was in Singapore recently, where I hope that he had time to listen and to appreciate the successes of Singapore and not just to make speeches there. Had he done so, he would have recognised that the value of our exports to Singapore in the year to last June rose by 60 per cent.

Since that time, Rolls-Royce has secured a major £1 billion contract for its Trent engines with Singapore Airlines.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Do not the figures that my right hon. Friend has just given—exports to the EU of £88 billion and to the rest of the world of £62 billion—reinforce the enormous importance to this country's economy of the single market? Will he therefore take this opportunity to pay tribute to the single market, and to Baroness Thatcher, whose initiative in introducing the Single European Act and providing for qualified majority voting established the essential precondition for the success of the single market programme?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. United Kingdom exports are doing extremely well. In 1994 the UK increased its exports faster than the United States and Japan, and faster than our European competitors.

Telephone Numbers

3. **Ms Janet Anderson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on telephone number portability. [7887]

The Minister for Science and Technology (Mr. Ian Taylor): I welcome the conclusions of the MMC's report on number portability, which mean that from this spring customers will be able to keep their telephone number when they change their telephone operator.

Ms Anderson: The Government claim to wish to encourage competition in telecommunications services because that is in the interests of consumers—and we welcome what the Minister has just said—but who is to shoulder the cost for this?

Mr. Taylor: The MMC decided to allocate 65 per cent. of the costs to BT and 35 per cent. to the other telephone operator. The prospect of competition in the telephone industry has been of enormous advantage to customers. The real costs of telephone calls have fallen by 40 per cent. since the privatisation and liberalisation that were originally opposed by Opposition Members. The benefits are to be seen in the investment in the industry, not just by BT but by many other companies, such as Energis, and by the cable industry. Customers have enjoyed enormous improvements in terms of quality and much reduced costs and are now gaining access to the super-highways which will deliver new and exciting multimedia services.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the United Kingdom has the most liberal telecommunications regime in western Europe and that other countries will be copying us? That is a tribute to the Government and shows how short-sighted the Opposition were when they opposed privatisation.

Mr. Taylor: I think that the Opposition are beginning slowly to realise that Conservative policies work, which is why they are attempting to adopt them in their speeches. The reality is that the rest of the European Union is also adopting liberalisation policies. I hope that the strict regulatory regime and the encouragement for market entry for new companies will both be factors that other countries in the European Union will adopt as they move towards 1 January 1998—the date for liberalisation.

Mr. Hoon: Is the Minister really saying that the best way to protect telephone consumers is to commission a Monopolies and Mergers Commission report which takes eight months to produce and runs to 213 detailed pages? Does not resorting to such a cumbersome procedure demonstrate the Government's consistent and continuing failure to anticipate the problems involved in the regulation of privatised industries? Is not that failure exactly the same as the Government's failure to anticipate the massive confusion caused by the break-up of our railway network and the belated recognition that two new quangos will have to be established to sort out the mess that the Government have created?

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Member might like to go away and practise that question again as I am not sure whether he means that the Labour party is now not in favour of regulation at all, or whether it is in favour of the regulator having such powers that no commercial company has a right to debate any changes in the licensing in public before those changes are permitted. The purpose of addressing a matter to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission is when an interested party—in this case British Telecom—and the regulator cannot agree on how costs are to be allocated. That is the role of the MMC. It did an excellent job and I have already welcomed its conclusions. The benefit of its conclusions will carry through to customers because if they wish to change to a new operator, they will not have the hassle of losing their telephone number with the change. That is very good news and I hope that, on reflection, the hon. Member will welcome it.

Electronics Industry

4. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the impact of the electronics industry on the British economy. [7888]

Mr. Ian Taylor: With an estimated annual output of £22 billion, the UK has the fifth largest electronics industry in the world and it is growing fast. Electronics contributes to the production of industries using computers, electronic control, multimedia and telecommunication systems. My Department has several schemes designed to provide wide-ranging support for the growth of the industry.

Mr. Congdon: Does my hon. Friend also agree that the electronics industry has been particularly successful in attracting inward investment which has benefited it? Is not the success of that industry illustrated by the fact that this country is the seventh largest supplier of silicon chips, Scotland provides 35 per cent. of the personal computers produced in the European Community and, surprisingly, this country is now a net exporter of television sets? Is that not a credit to our electronics industry, which would be flat on its back if the Government had followed the policies advocated by the Labour party?

Mr. Taylor: I am delighted to say that the Government did not listen to the Opposition and so have attracted inward investment. That investment has done a terrific job in the electronics industry, which is so crucial. In semiconductors, we are moving up the international league tables very fast. Siemens has put its massive plant in the north-east, which will transform not only work in industry, but the benefits to universities of research. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, when he was Secretary of State for Scotland, saw an

enormous benefit there. Scotland now has a remarkable record—35 per cent. of all European production of personal computers is based there, which is a great tribute to the economic climate in this country and the industriousness of workers in the industry.

Mr. Ingram: If inward investment in such key sectors as the electronics industry and the selling of the United Kingdom abroad are some of the Government's main aims, can the Minister explain the outrageous and potentially damaging comments made by the Deputy Prime Minister and other senior Ministers when they attacked the efforts of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition in his recent speech in Tokyo, when he promoted Britain as a place for inward investment to business leaders there? Why do Ministers persist in such cheap, party political point scoring, to the detriment of the long-term interests of British industry and the economy? When will they learn that there are more important issues at stake than papering over the cracks of the divisions and disarray that are becoming the hallmarks of the present Government?

Mr. Taylor: Nothing about this Government is cheap. Even in our criticisms of the Opposition, we indulge only in high value added jibes and taunts. I welcome the work of the Leader of the Opposition in promoting the United Kingdom in Asia. He realises, as we do, just how successful the Conservative Government have been and we are delighted with his efforts to tell the rest of the world about the success of the United Kingdom economy. I do not criticise him for that. If you, Madam Speaker, would allow it I might indulge in some discursive criticism of stakeholders, but that is not permitted now. It is crucial that Opposition Members realise the importance to the United Kingdom of investment by Japanese, Korean and Taiwanese companies, among others. The enormous investment in the electronics industry is creating jobs. There has also been investment from north America and Canada, producing terrific opportunities in the United Kingdom. And it is all thanks to the work of the Conservative Government.

Export Support

6. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what support his Department is giving to United Kingdom businesses which are seeking to export their goods. [7890]

Mr. Lang: The Government believe that international trade is vital to national competitiveness. Through Overseas Trade Services, my Department provides a first-rate package of information, advice and practical assistance to all British companies wishing to explore new export opportunities. In particular, we are assisting smaller firms through the business links network, which will help them to develop effective strategies to take advantage of international trade opportunities.

Mr. Evans: Will my right hon. Friend acknowledge that many companies can export successfully with little support from the DTI? One example is 3M in my constituency, which employs 250 people and exports 58 per cent. of its production of pharmaceutical aerosols and containers. However, many other companies need full support from the DTI to enable them to export their goods. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the trained staff in our embassies and high commissions take a proactive line in ensuring that the opportunities available abroad are made known, not only to those companies which contact the DTI but to others which do not?

Mr. Lang: Yes, I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. I particularly welcome the fact that there are now more commercial officers at FCO posts overseas. We have a programme of training and experience to improve the professionalism of Overseas Trade Services staff. My hon. Friend mentioned the pharmaceutical industry. He may like to know that exports by that industry rose last year by 37 per cent. to the European Union and 16 per cent. to non-EU countries.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: In so far as representatives of the Campbell's Soups company are in contact with departmental officials to discuss export marketing initiatives, why cannot those discussions be used as a forum in which representatives of that company can be told the real position of departmental officials and what is going on in my constituency? Does the Secretary of State share my outrage and concern and that of 332 other Members? In that light, is it not now time that departmental officials took a more hands-on approach to the matter?

Mr. Lang: The main question before the House relates to exports. I am not certain whether the hon. Gentleman is contemplating the export of the soups produced by that factory. The context of his question makes it impossible for me to answer it and remain in order, but I can reassure him that since 1979 the volume of British exports has nearly doubled and manufacturing exports have risen by almost 90 per cent.

Mr. Thomason: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that his Department is looking to encourage exporters among small businesses, of which are there are many in my constituency, as they are not always aware of the opportunities which may be available to them and have particular needs which larger companies can often fulfil within their own specialisations? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that small businesses are also important to his Department?

Mr. Lang: I am happy to reassure my hon. Friend on that point. Successful though our export record is, we are keen to increase by a further 30,000 the present total of 100,000 or so companies which currently export. To that end, we have recruited some 70 export counsellors who will make their services available to small companies through the business links network.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Does the President of the Board of Trade acknowledge that cumulatively over the years Scotch whisky has become our biggest single export? Although it is welcome that the Chancellor of the Exchequer reversed his tax increase on whisky of the previous fiscal year, the industry still encounters resistance in persuading difficult markets abroad to lower their taxes. Meanwhile, it continues to suffer penal taxation rates at home. Will the right hon. Gentleman make representations to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to continue reducing the penal rate of tax on Scotch whisky compared with, for example, that on imported wine?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman knows how my right [illegible] learned Friend responded in his last Budget to

the case made by the Scotch Whisky Association. The issue of whisky duty in Japan has been taken by the British Government to the World Trade Organisation under its arrangements for dispute settlement. Scotland's largest export is electronic office equipment. Overall, UK computer exports to the European Union have increased 55 per cent. in the last year.

Trade with Japan

7. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the balance of trade between the United Kingdom and Japan. [7891]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Phillip Oppenheim): In 1994, the last full year for which figures are available, the UK had a balance of trade deficit with Japan of £5.9 billion. In the first 11 months of 1995, UK exports to Japan rose 25 per cent. while imports rose 9 per cent. in the same period.

Mr. Dunn: Although I welcome those figures, to what extent would our trade with Japan grow if we reintroduced the closed shop and had worker councils, the minimum wage, union-only labour and all the policies to which the deceitful bunch opposite would sign up if given the chance?

Madam Speaker: Order. Did I hear the hon. Gentleman use the word "deceitful" in referring to hon. Members? If so, I am sure that he will wish to rephrase his question.

Mr. Dunn: Of course I withdraw the remark, Madam Speaker. I did not mean it, in the heat of the moment.

Mr. Oppenheim: I can give my hon. Friend a graphic example of what happened to British industry when Labour implemented those policies. Triumph was a world leader in motor cycle manufacturing in the 1950s. By the 1970s, after Government meddling and bad industrial relations, Triumph was bankrupt and the Japanese took over the market. That was the reality of British manufacturing under Labour. Triumph motor cycles started up again in the 1980s. It is now competitive and producing high-quality bikes. It exports world wide, including to Japan, and jobs and production are expanding. That is the reality of the high-quality manufacturing that Britain has under the present Government.

Mr. Sheerman: Is the Minister not aware that under a Labour Government, at least in manufactured exports, this country had a surplus against Europe and against the rest of the world, including Japan? The Secretary of State did not answer my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett). This country's economy will not be right until it starts manufacturing the products wanted abroad and selling them in greater numbers.

Mr. Oppenheim: It might surprise the hon. Gentleman to know that I entirely agree that we shall get the economy right when we manage to sell our goods to the world. That is precisely what did not happen under Labour, when the surplus fell sharply and Britain's productivity growth was bottom of the group of industrialised nations. I will tell the hon. Gentleman about two important figures. Since 1980, British manufacturing productivity growth has been top of the major industrialised nations, and this country has closed no less than three quarters of the productivity gap with Germany. We may not be back in the first division of industrialised nations, but we are getting there, which is far better than in the 1970s under Labour.

Mr. Atkins: Is my hon. Friend aware of the contract that has just been made between Leyland Trucks Ltd. in my constituency and Isuzu of Japan to manufacture and assemble 1,000 trucks over the next few months? The two specific reasons that Japan gave for the contract were the excellence of my constituents' manufacturing ability and its belief that the British economy is the best in the western world.

Mr. Oppenheim: My right hon. Friend makes a valuable point. Opposition Members will recall the situation in the 1970s, when multinational car manufacturers such as General Motors and Ford were falling over themselves to push capacity out of Britain and foreigners would not buy GM or Ford cars if they were made in this country. Today, General Motors, Vauxhall, Isuzu and other Japanese manufacturers are investing massive amounts of money in car manufacturing in Britain and are exporting those vehicles. That stark comparison illustrates how much more competitive and efficient British manufacturing is now, compared with the dark days of the 1970s.

Coalfield Communities

8. **Mr. Tipping:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he has taken to ensure that the activities currently undertaken by British Coal Enterprise in coalfield communities will continue. [7892]

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Energy (Mr. Richard Page): The sale of British Coal Enterprise is a matter for British Coal, which has recognised from the start that in considering proposals the continuation of effective assistance to coalfield communities by purchasers is a priority.

Mr. Tipping: Will the Minister confirm that he has seen research from independent experts showing that British Coal Enterprise has created thousands of jobs in coalfield communities? Will he talk to the chairman of British Coal to ensure that BCE is not necessarily sold to the highest bidder but goes to the bidder offering value for money—that is, the bidder who promises to retain and create much needed jobs in coalfield communities?

Mr. Page: I pay tribute to the work that BCE has done over the years. It estimates that it has created about 123,000 job opportunities in the coalfield areas. British Coal has pre-qualified 14 organisations to bid for all of BCE or its individual activities. These include nine organisations for business funding, six for work space and four for Grosvenor. The deadline for receipt of firm offers will be the end of the month and BCE remains on course for sale by the end of March. British Coal will regard as a priority those bids which seek to continue BCE's work.

Mr. Battle: As a result of the Government presiding over wholesale pit closures, entire communities are facing a generation of unemployment. Does the Minister agree that some mining communities still face unemployment levels between 30 and 50 per cent. above the national average? Has not the promise made by Ministers two

years ago to mining communities suffering dislocation proved entirely inadequate? Selling off British Coal Enterprise will not help. Where are the Government's detailed action plans for investing in desperately needed economic restructuring to ensure that mining communities get some work and some hope? Or will the Government walk away again, leaving behind a shambles with everyone but themselves expected to pick up the tab?

Mr. John Marshall: Arthur would like that.

Mr. Page: As I have said, the sale of BCE is a matter for British Coal. I must reject what the hon. Gentleman says. The Government continue to provide support for economic regeneration activities through regional selective assistance and the single regeneration budget, in addition to support available for European structural funds. The coal industry to which the hon. Gentleman seems to be harking back—and which I believe, indeed, that Arthur Scargill wishes to recreate—was losing the country and the taxpayer £1.3 billion a year. The hon. Gentleman seems conveniently to forget that sort of figure. I know, however, that he will gain comfort from the fact that unemployment rates in all of the 27 coal communities have fallen since 1992 as well as from the fact that coal production in 1995 was up on that in 1994 and imports were down in that period. That is a success story of which we should all be proud.

Insurance and Financial Services

9. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his latest assessment of the value to the United Kingdom of overseas earnings from insurance and financial services. [7893]

The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John M. Taylor) It has been estimated by British Invisibles that net overseas earnings of the UK financial sector rose by nearly a third in 1994 to £20.4 billion, of which net overseas earnings by insurance institutions contributed £3.9 billion.

Mr. Greenway: Will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating the London Insurance and Reinsurance Market Association on its fifth anniversary yesterday and on the success achieved in that time at the new London underwriting centre, which has contributed to the excellent news that he has announced? When I asked leading members of the association yesterday what concerned them about the future, I was told that it was European monetary union. It seems that they are as ambivalent about it as the House is. They said, however, that in view of the complexities of a single currency for London-based insurers it is vital that the Government remain central to the discussions about EMU. Will my hon. Friend bear those concerns in mind?

Mr. Taylor: I certainly will. I join my hon. Friend in congratulating LIRMA on its fifth birthday. He will know better than me that the main currency of reinsurance is US dollars, but the London market is well used to dealing in multiple currencies. My Department stays in close touch with the industry. I agree with the prudence of staying close to all negotiations in Europe.

Mr. Olner: Although I welcome the earnings that insurance companies bring into the country, does the Minister agree that Baroness Thatcher was completely and utterly wrong when she thought that all this country's benefits could in future be supplied by the insurance industry and not the manufacturing industries, whose capacity we have lost year after year?

Mr. Taylor: I think that it is appropriate for me to tell the House that the UK has an extremely successful insurance market. London is the world's leading insurance centre. The Department of Trade and Industry, with secondees from the industry, is working with insurers to maintain our competitiveness: this includes a major benchmarking initiative to spread best practice throughout the industry; making the best use of new technology; and improving management development and training. Insurance is a major British success.

Small Businesses

10. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what further steps are planned to remove unnecessary regulations on small businesses. [7894]

Mr. Page: Small firms are vital to Britain's well-being. My ministerial colleagues and I therefore always look for ways to reduce the burden of regulation on small firms. One of the most significant ways in which my Department achieves that is by exempting small business from regulation wherever possible, for example in company law and competition law.

Mr. Hawkins: I welco[illegible] my hon. Friend has just said about small businesses, which are so vital in constituencies such as those in Blackpool. What are the Government doing systematically to ensure that unnecessary regulations are not placed on the backs of small businesses to start with? Surely prevention is better than cure.

Mr. Page: My hon. Friend has put his finger on the nub of the problem. Prevention is better than cure. The Government, through the competitiveness White Paper which is produced every year, are looking to see how they can reduce the various regulatory burdens on small business. I know that a series of conferences is taking place throughout the country, entitled "Your Business Matters", and the messages on the burdens that are unnecessary are coming through and will be responded to.

The most positive thing that has happened has been the appointment of a small business Minister in every Government Department, as announced by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. I am convinced that those small business Ministers, who will watch legislation as it is proposed and how it might affect smaller businesses, are the way to improve the situation for the future.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Have not 1,000 regulations been identified as suitable for repeal, and have not the vast majority of them been carried into law by the Government since 1979? Do not the facts contradict the rhetoric that we always get from Conservative Members? Have not the Government engulfed small businesses in red tape and bureaucracy?

Mr. Page: I look forward to the hon. Gentleman supplying me with information that proves that the statement that he just made is factually correct, because I sincerely have my doubts. Of the 1,000 regulations earmarked for amendment or repeal, more than 500 had

been dealt with by the end of last year: for example, 75,000 small firms no longer need to pay VAT; there is a continuous licensing system for goods and public service vehicle operators; and restrictions on shop hours have been removed. We have made a positive move to reduce the burdens on smaller firms.

Sir Michael Grylls: I welcome the very good work that my hon. Friend has done, but will he undertake to use the maximum exemption limit for small firms—those with a turnover of £4 million—rather than a lower figure? The limit of £4 million, as allowed by the European Union, would exempt far more firms from unnecessary red tape. Surely we should use the maximum figure rather than set a lower figure, because a firm with a turnover of £4 million is still a very small firm.

Mr. Page: My hon. Friend is well known for the support that he has given small firms over the years, and I can only listen to what he has to say with reverence and attention. I assure him that we shall do whatever we can to reduce burdens on small firms.

EU Directives

12. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the implementation of EU directives by his Department. [7897]

Mr. Oppenheim: The Department carries out full consultation with industry during the negotiation and implementation of EC directives. National legislation implementing EC directives is scrutinised to ensure that there is no confusion between European and national laws, and that legislative requirements are as light as possible.

Mrs. Gorman: Does the Minister agree with the view expressed by Mr. Bryan Cassidy, a Member of the European Parliament who came to speak to a Back-Bench committee recently, that none of the European directives comes with penalties attached or requires the attachment of such penalties? Does he agree that much of the damage that such directives cause to industry is due to the fact that we do not treat them as the rest of Europe does—as examples of best practice that should not necessarily be implemented fully? Could not the Department set a shining example by refusing to gold-plate any of the 19 major directives that Mr. Cassidy warned us were in the pipeline, and that were recently announced by Mr. Santer?

Mr. Oppenheim: My hon. Friend has made some fair points. There is currently more awareness of the need to ensure that we do not gold-plate directives, and that responsibility is taken seriously. Eight directives are being reviewed, and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has a programme of visits to other European Union states to ensure that they realise how burdensome regulations can be, particularly for small businesses. Penalties are sometimes needed to ensure compliance with, in particular, health and safety regulations, which involve important considerations, but I have much sympathy with what my hon. Friend has said.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister accept that, to date, Britain has done more gold-plating and adding on to European directives than any other European Union nation? The Government have done that to prevent the House from discussing the issues. Will the Minister go a little further than he did a few moments ago, and guarantee that that will not happen in future?

Mr. Oppenheim: There are so many self-serving fallacies in that that it is difficult to know where to begin. The hon. Gentleman's party accepted the social chapter, which would impose a further huge burden of expensive regulation on British business and would cost people their jobs. Moreover, surely the idea of the stakeholder economy is all about regulation. What is it if it is not regulation? Opposition Members have a cheek talking about a stakeholder economy; when they were in power we had a hamburger economy, because they had made mincemeat of British industry.

Mr. Budgen: I warmly congratulate the Government on their announcement last week in the other place that they would not endorse a European directive that prevents the use of the drug emtryl in game birds. Does that not reflect a fundamental change in the Government's attitude to European directives? Does it not demonstrate that such directives lack democratic validity, are not properly discussed and are not uniformly enforced, and that the general arguments about the importance of the rule of law do not apply to directives that are forced down the throats of the British people?

Mr. Oppenheim: I accept my hon. Friend's warm congratulations, and reciprocate them with the same warmth. However, his sporting credentials in regard to putting drugs down the necks of game birds are probably stronger than mine, and his comments might be more appropriately directed to my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

We take non-compliance in other states very seriously. Any substantive complaints that my hon. Friend has should be made to the DTI's single market compliance unit, which will investigate them.

Dr. Howells: Is the Minister aware that, although this country might be prepared to implement European Union directives, other member states are less compliant? The draft directive on the opening up of the electricity market in Europe, for example, continues to be flouted by the French Government, and they deny British generators access to very profitable continental markets. What do the Government intend to do to ensure that our efficient and low-cost companies are given the opportunity to compete fairly with the likes of Electricité de France, subsidised as it is up to its nuclear eyeballs, and secure good futures for our power stations, coal mines and gasfields?

Mr. Oppenheim: It is a marvellous tribute to the rightward lurch of Labour that an Opposition Front-Bench spokesman is singing the praises of liberalisation and saying that the most efficient and cost-effective companies should have access to the market. If the hon. Gentleman is so against subsidies and regulations and so in favour of competition and liberalisation in France, why do the Opposition constantly oppose those things in Britain?

Aerospace Industry

13. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion of the total export of the United Kingdom is accounted for by the aerospace industry. [7899]

The Minister for Industry and Energy (Mr. Tim Eggar): The best currently available estimate of the

proportion of the UK's total manufactured exports accounted for by the aerospace industry in 1994 is about 7 per cent.

Mr. Evans: Does my right hon. Friend agree that a strong home market leads to a strong export market? Does he also agree that it is a bit rich for that lot over there to start talking about cutting the defence budget by £6 billion and about making things that nobody wants, as they did in the 1970s? Is it not about time that we told them straight that we have the best defence industry and have spent £6 billion more on defence than they would have done? When that lot opposite stop talking about stakes in Britain and start talking common sense, it will be better for all of us.

Mr. Eggar: I could not have said it better myself.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Is the Minister in a position to say whether there are any concerns at the moment in the aviation or aerospace industry? What is the latest on the future large aircraft?

Mr. Eggar: I think it is fair to say that in the civil aerospace industry, including the sector that is covered by Shorts, demand is generally more buoyant now than it has been for a couple of years, and expectations are rising. British companies, Rolls-Royce and BAe in particular, have had some spectacular orders over the past few months. It is an internationally competitive market. We have to continue assisting our aerospace industry to keep costs down and to stay in the forefront of technology. The Government are totally committed to that.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Would my right hon. Friend congratulate Avro International Aerospace, a subsidiary company of British Aerospace, on its great success with its RJ series which it is selling not just in Europe but in many countries, including America? Is my right hon. Friend's Department assisting British Aerospace with any future developments of aircraft which are so vital to this country's manufacturing capacity?

Mr. Eggar: I certainly join my hon. Friend in congratulating Avro International, which won a particularly important order in August from Sabena. I pay tribute to everybody in British Aerospace who has transformed that company. There is no doubt that in manufacturing it is a world leader and it is accepted as such by aerospace companies throughout the world. My Department is working extremely closely with that company. One of the encouraging signs is that BAe is working not just with the Government but with its suppliers and engine manufacturers to present to the world a better integrated UK capability in the whole aerospace supply chain. That is in the interests of BAe and the whole country.

Water Companies

14. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will take steps to ensure that all bids by water companies for other privatised utilities are referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. [7901]

Mr. John M. Taylor: No. Each merger case will continue to be considered on its own merits and against the background of the market position at the time.

Mr. Hanson: Does the Minister think that it is in the interests of consumers in places such as south Wales and north-west England for one monopoly to buy another to create an even bigger monopoly? Is that not both anti-competitive and anti-consumer? Will he take time today to rethink his decision so that the basic interests of people in those regions are at least reviewed by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission?

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman is right to draw my attention to consumers' interests. I will tell the House the story of the privatised utilities. Water investment has doubled. Our water is among the cleanest in Europe. Electricity prices are down 7 per cent., gas prices are down 23.5 per cent. and, since 1984, telecoms prices have been down 35 per cent. That is a success story all round, especially for the consumer.

Mr. Harry Greenway: What is the position in Thames Water's region? Is it not true that at no point were hose bans introduced during the hot weather, and that supplies were properly maintained to all parts of the Thames region throughout the recent water shortages? What is the quality of Thames Water?

Mr. Taylor: Better than ever is the answer to the final limb of my hon. Friend's question. He is right to offer an antidote to the scaremongering. I am glad that he brings a proper balance to these issues.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Does the Minister agree with Ian Byatt, the water industry regulator, that there cannot be adequate regulation of a water industry that has been taken over by companies unless they are listed separately on the stock exchange and present separate accounts to stop them hiding gross profiteering from consumers and avoiding complying with Greenbury rules on executive perks and pay disclosure?

Mr. Taylor: I should not want to comment on any case that is uncompleted. It is for the Director General of Fair Trading to advise my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, who will make decisions and announcements in due course, but I will carefully study the matters to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Steel Industry

15. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what special measures he proposes to assist the United Kingdom steel industry; and if he will make a statement. [7903]

Mr. Eggar: My Department is working with the industry on a number of initiatives aimed at improving further the competitiveness of an industry, the performance of which since privatisation has been among the world's best.

Mr. Jones: In view of the wretched trade figures, why do the Government not give priority to steel exports, and specifically manufactured goods? Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the steel industry and, specifically, steel workers have made a great contribution to Britain's enterprise, ensuring productivity, flexibility and profitability? Why does not the Minister, on the Government's behalf, acknowledge the great sacrifices made by steel communities in terms of redundancies and closures and acknowledge that the industry needs more Government support with exports?

Mr. Eggar: The lesson of the past 20 years in the steel industry is that when the state owns it and intervenes it is

a blinking disaster, but that when it goes into the private sector after privatisation it is extremely successful. Let me spell it out for the hon. Gentleman. Between 1975 and 1985, every individual in this country subsidised British Steel to the tune of £135. Since privatisation in 1986, British Steel has contributed £220 million in corporation tax to the Exchequer. Privatised British Steel has been a success; state-owned British Steel was a disaster.

Mr. Michael Brown: To underline what my right hon. Friend has said, may I inform him that, on Monday, I visited Humber power station, which is under construction in my constituency? Will he note that that gas-fired power station was given the go-ahead by Her Majesty's Government and that every piece of steel that I saw there had been produced by British Steel, Scunthorpe? Is not the answer to the question of the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) that we must ensure that there are customers such as Humber Power, which buys steel because of its price and quality?

Mr. Eggar: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. The changes that have been made to the previously state-owned sector have turned around what was a serious position for the providers of our infrastructure, electricity and gas. From lagging behind the rest of the world in efficiency, they have become world leaders. That has benefited the British steel industry and British industry as a whole because it has reduced energy costs overall.

Mr. Hardy: Does the Minister understand that part of the cost and loss of the nationalised industry was due to the investment decisions of Lord Walker and a former Conservative Government, who instructed it to pursue a policy investment that would realise a 30 million tonne a year capacity?

Will the right hon. Gentleman focus his mind on the serious problem that steel production may be moving down from the top of the cycle—he must realise that it is a cyclical industry—and accept that it is therefore imperative that the Government prevent our European neighbours from continuing the unfair trading practices that they enjoyed for several years until the cycle improved?

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman is rewriting history with his view of the investment pattern of British Steel. I find it surprising that the hon. Gentleman, who knows a great deal about the industry, has not welcomed British Steel's investment announcement of another £65 million for the Llanwern mill. He has also not welcomed the fact that British Steel used to take 13 man hours to produce a tonne of liquid steel, whereas now it takes only four man hours. That is the scale of achievement by a privatised British Steel and the hon. Gentleman should pay tribute to it.

Digital Terrestrial Services

16. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to promote the manufacture and marketing of digital terrestrial television converters and digital audio broadcast receivers; and if he will make a statement. [7904]

Mr. Ian Taylor: We are creating the regulatory framework in which digital terrestrial services can flourish in the United Kingdom. Applicants for multiplex operating licences under the Broadcasting Bill will be judged on their proposals for promoting or assisting the acquisition of digital receiving equipment by viewers and listeners in the proposed coverage areas.

The Government have put in place a practical plan that will ensure that analogue services are switched off at the earliest achievable date. That will create a significant market opportunity for the industry, with perhaps about £8 billion in replacement televisions alone.

Mr. Fabricant: I thank my hon. Friend for his long, detailed and helpful answer. Does he agree that this country has led the world in introducing a liberalised policy for broadcasting and broadcasting technology? Does he recall that the Labour party opposed the introduction of ITV, opposed the introduction of satellite broadcasting and opposed the introduction of Channel 4 and Channel 5 television? Does he agree that the last thing we want is a Government stakeholder in companies such as British Telecom?

Mr. Taylor: There is no doubt that the policies of the Labour party would drive a stake through the competitive nature of the telecoms industry that is so vital if we are to deliver the information society at prices that the customer can afford.

In this digital age for television, I very much welcome the Broadcasting Bill. It will give Britain the opportunity to be the first country in the European Union to move to digital television. If things go well and investments improve, the Bill will give me a fairly rapid opportunity to retrieve the analogue spectrum, which I can then redeploy for further broadcasting and telecommunications activities.

Mr. Miller: Towards the end of the Minister's response, he mentioned the radio spectrum. Which Departments have provided him with information on the potential release of the parts of the spectrum that they currently control? Will he expand on his comment about the distribution of the analogue spectrum when some of the terrestrial television companies release it?

Mr. Taylor: The Radiocommunications Agency, which reports to me, is responsible for the management of all the spectrum in this country. It is doing an efficient job, including clawing back underused spectrum from Departments such as the Ministry of Defence. We are also considering the way in which the emergency services deliver their use of the spectrum.

It is clear that the new mobile services, the new fixed-link service and the results of the recent competition to use parts of the spectrum to deliver multimedia services in rural areas will all require very close and detailed management of the spectrum. I am confident that as analogue is switched off and the public move to digital—which has enormous benefits for them—I shall be able to claw back and use the analogue spectrum on what are known as television bands 4 and 5. In those areas, some of it will be used for digital, but the majority will be redeployed with great value to telecommunications and further broadcasting activities.

I want that to happen as soon as possible. We have undertaken to review it within five years or when there is 50 per cent. coverage in the United Kingdom. The details are in the Broadcasting Bill.

Mr. Ian Bruce: My hon. Friend will know that the all-party cable and satellite television group meets

regularly. It has heard from some broadcasters who are concerned that the Department of Trade and Industry may be giving preferential treatment to existing terrestrial broadcasters over the distribution of digital channels, especially those via satellite. In allocating the digital spectrum, I urge him to ensure the widest possible access to the television market for as many people as possible and not to leave monopolies to the BBC and the existing terrestrial ITV companies.

Mr. Taylor: I hear what my hon. Friend says. A terrific amount of investment will be required to move into the digital age. There are not that many players in the game with the required capital, but alliances that we cannot predict at the moment may take us into this exciting new market. The Broadcasting Bill—on which the Department of Trade and Industry, as well as the Department of National Heritage, has had considerable impact—gives the maximum flexibility to incomers who wish for the first time to be involved in digital transmission and the control of multiplexes. It also gives existing terrestrial broadcasters the opportunity to do what they can to make the most of their enormous content and production facilities. ITV, BBC and Channel 4 will have to notify us within a certain period whether they wish to take that opportunity. It is absolutely right that they should be given that opportunity if we are to develop a competitive marketplace.

Fuel Supply

18. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will meet the chairmen of the privatised utilities to discuss fuel supply. [7906]

Mr. Eggar: I have no present plans to meet the chairmen of the privatised utilities.

Mr. Canavan: When the Minister eventually gets round to meeting them, will he discuss the widespread incidence of fuel poverty? Although the chairmen may say that there has been a decrease in fuel disconnections by the fuel companies in recent years, there has been an increase in self-disconnection by people who simply cannot afford to pay their fuel bills, including pensioners who are at risk of hypothermia, especially during severe weather such as that recently experienced in Scotland. Will the Minister urge his ministerial colleagues to reduce VAT on domestic fuel and introduce a much fairer system of cold weather payments to help to eradicate fuel poverty?

Mr. Eggar: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the tribute that he has paid to the privatised utilities for the way in which they have reduced significantly the number of cut-offs of domestic consumers. A number of the English regional electricity companies have not cut off any individual consumer now for some months. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would also be the first to pay tribute to the Government and the electricity companies for the introduction in England and Wales of the £50 rebate as a result of the flotation of the National Grid. That will be welcomed by many electricity consumers—those well-off and those less well-off.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: What has been the reduction in the real cost to consumers of gas and electricity since privatisation?

Mr. Eggar: Gas prices have fallen by about 23 per cent. in real terms since privatisation. Customers can look forward to further significant reductions as a result of the introduction of competition in gas. The latest offer being made to consumers in the south-west gas trial area is a further reduction of 25.2 per cent., as against the British Gas standard tariff, if they sign up and buy gas from one particular company. That is as a result of the introduction of competition and the sustained Government policy of privatisation and giving choice to consumers.

Telephone Numbers

19. **Mr. Timms:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade which EU countries have adopted the 04 prefix for mobile telephone numbers and which 06; and if he will make a statement. [7907]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Director General of Telecommunications, who has responsibility for numbering issues within the UK, announced a major review of numbering in October. It will cover many issues, including the question of the numbering range for mobile services, noting that there is not yet a complete Europe-wide database listing the proposed use of different numbering prefixes.

Mr. Timms: Is the Minister aware that the current proposal appears to be that the UK will adopt the digit 4, whereas France and the Netherlands have adopted 6, and Germany is likely to do the same? Is not this one area in which, notwithstanding Conservative difficulties over European issues, everyone would agree that there should be a common European approach? Is the Minister also aware of the possibility that if the UK, uniquely, adopts the digit 4, a 6 will have to be added on to the front of all the numbers at some point, causing immense disturbance and nuisance to everybody? Should we not stick with the European solution, on this issue at least?

Mr. Taylor: I am aware that the hon. Gentleman had experience in this area before he joined the House. The Director General of Telecommunications obviously wishes to maintain control over the national numbering plan. He is, however, well aware of the implications of what is happening in the rest of the European Union. There is absolutely no doubt that the common spread of standards in mobile telephony throughout the European Union, now that we are moving into the digital age and one can move from country to country with the same phone, is vital. I take note of what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Water Charges (Amendment)

3.30 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Water Industry Act 1991 to prohibit the use by water undertakers of rateable values as a basis for charging from 31st March 1997; to provide for charging by water undertakers in accordance with council tax bands; and for connected purposes.

I put on record at the outset my warm appreciation of the widespread support for the Bill by all parties. The sponsors include senior Members not only from all parts of the House, but from all parts of England and Wales. I especially appreciate the support of the other four officers of the all-party water group, who top the list.

I have not invited Scottish Members to endorse the Bill for the simple reason that the council tax banding system is already used in Scotland to calculate sewerage charges. From April this year, it will be used for the water and sewerage elements so that the charges can be raised by that means. That may give cause for thought to any maverick Conservative Members who think that our Bill is impractical, undesirable or ill timed. Surely, what is good enough for Scotland is good enough for England and Wales.

By way of background, I shall sketch out the scale of the water charge problem. This year's average domestic bill for water and sewerage services nationally will be £205. In many water company areas, rises are around 8 per cent., which is way above inflation. However, that figure understates the burden in many areas.

The highest charges in the country are to be found in the south-west, which has the lowest average household income, above average unemployment and many more elderly residents than is the case for most other areas. The South West Water average this year is a staggering £332. Many people pay well over that—up to £600 or even more—if they live in highly rated properties. Many of those people are pensioners on low incomes.

Seven years ago, the average water and sewerage bill in the south-west was just £150. It increased by £153 to £303 by 1994, more than doubling in five years. Although the rate of increase has eased, the impact on low-income households is still disproportionately severe. South West Water's charges are £38 higher on average than those of the second most expensive water company, Anglian, and a staggering £150 more than the charges of the cheapest water and sewerage company, Thames Water.

Many hon. Members in the Chamber will acknowledge that the area has some of the highest levels of unemployment in the country, while average earnings are 20 per cent. below the national average. People who live in an area with the lowest average earnings in the country are paying the highest water charges. Some 3 per cent. of the population are paying for cleaning up 30 per cent. of Britain's eligible beaches. Some 30 per cent. of customers in the south-west are pensioners, and almost 9 per cent. of their income is being spent on water bills. Many individuals must pay even more. Nationally, the burden may not seem so dire, but the basic illogicality of the charging system is no less stark.

In the past, it has been suggested that universal metering was the answer. Even if the Government and Ofwat tried to force everyone on to water meters—which is impossible in the foreseeable future—there would be minimal savings for most householders. The extra costs of installation would take years to pay off, with limited charge reductions. I am indebted to the Consumers Association and to *Which?* for an excellent analysis of what would happen. In the Southern company area, it would take nearly 11 years to recoup the cost of installing meters. In Wessex, it would take nearly nine years, while in the Thames area, it would take nearly 23 years. In the North West, Northumbrian and Severn Trent area, the costs of installation would never be recouped.

This is an issue of national concern. The House will recall that the Government admitted the total inadequacy of the rating system when they abolished its use for local council purposes some seven years ago. Today, it is manifestly even more out of date. Ministers acknowledged some nine months ago that there is not the faintest chance of transferring all householders to water meters in the foreseeable future.

The Bill would ensure that water companies switched to the council tax banding system in April 1997. That would have five major advantages: first, it would mean that the valuation would be relatively recent and subject to a fair review; secondly, single residents or householders could be made eligible for a 25 per cent. rebate—as with the council tax—to reflect their lower usage; thirdly, the benefit system could be used to cushion the cost for lower-income householders, especially the elderly and those in the highest water charge areas; fourthly, there would be an obvious administrative saving, since councils could collect water charges on an agency basis and could cut out duplication; and fifthly, in the interests of simplicity, accountability and transparency, the householder would be able to compare the relative costs of different local services and be confident of co-ordination if and when there were band changes.

Given that the Government now acknowledge that the estimated cost of the complete metering of domestic properties is in excess of £2 billion and that it could take from 15 to 20 years, the banding system is the only realistic solution for now. Such a system involves capital savings, rather than increased capital costs. Southern Water, which carried out the largest trial of metering in the Isle of Wight, stated that it was opposed to widespread national metering, while the most innovative and enterprising companies—such as Wessex and Welsh Water—have declared their support for the change encompassed in the Bill.

In the South West Water area—where consumer costs have doubled since privatisation and are forecast to go on rising in the next four years—huge savings would result for the average low-income household. Significantly, in Scotland—where the council tax system is already used to calculate sewerage charges—the average combined water and sewerage bill is only £107, less than one third of the current burden for consumers in the south-west.

Of course, we still need public investment from the Government and from the European Union to ensure that a disproportionate burden does not fall on local residents, but with Ministers still reluctant to pursue that we simply cannot wait for a fairer system of charges. Some west country pensioners are already paying almost one tenth of their total income for water services.

In the meantime, the Bill could make a substantial difference to those people without removing the metering option for those who prefer it. The Bill has the support of all the officers of the all-party water group.

We call upon hon. Members from every part of the United Kingdom and every part of the political spectrum to help us persuade Ministers to back the Bill and to get it on to the statute book as quickly as possible.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Paul Tyler, Mrs. Helen Jackson, Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock, Mr. Richard Burden, Mr. David Nicholson, Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, Mr. Matthew Taylor, Mr. Peter L. Pike, Mr. A. J. Beith, Ms Jean Corston, Mr. Simon Hughes and Mr. Dafydd Wigley.

Water Charges (Amendment)

Mr. Paul Tyler accordingly presented a Bill to amend the Water Industry Act 1991 to prohibit the use by water undertakers of rateable values as a basis for charging from 31st March 1997; to provide for charging by water undertakers in accordance with council tax bands; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 2 February and to be printed. [Bill 43.]

Social Security

3.40 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): I beg to move,

That the draft Jobseeker's Allowance Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 19th December, be approved.

Madam Speaker: I understand that with this it will be convenient to discuss the following motions:

That the draft Income Support (General) (Jobseeker's Allowance Consequential Amendments) Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 19th December, be approved.

That the draft Social Security (Back to Work Bonus) Regulations 1996, a copy of which was laid before this House on 10th January, be approved.

That the draft Housing Benefit, Supply of Information and Council Tax Benefit (Amendment) Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 19th December, be approved.

That the draft Employer's Contributions Re-imbursement Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 12th December, be approved.

Mr. Forth: The jobseeker's allowance is a major step forward in creating a labour market in Britain that will continue to generate jobs and help unemployed people get those jobs. It is the next stage in the Government's strategy, the success of which is becoming clear to everyone—or at least to almost everyone.

The unemployment figures that were announced this morning demonstrate the strength of that strategy. For the 28th successive month, there has been another welcome decrease in the unemployment rate, which is due to two main factors. First, the economic environment created by the Government is widely recognised to have created as favourable an environment as can be imagined for the start of new businesses and inward investment into the United Kingdom, which not only creates new jobs but consolidates existing jobs. Secondly, the policies that we are developing and the dedication of our Employment Service staff identify the needs of individuals who, regrettably, have lost their jobs and help them back into work.

The fall in unemployment is set against a background where this country now has lower unemployment and more of its people in work than any other major European Union country. Employment has grown substantially in recent years, and new vacancies continue to be notified to jobcentres at record levels. The number of people getting jobs through the help of Employment Service staff is also at a record level. In all, we have seen unemployment fall by almost three quarters of a million since the recovery began. We are determined to reinforce that success, and believe that the benefit system has a vital role to play in helping unemployed people find jobs.

The benefit system should help and motivate every jobseeker, but the truth is that the current system of unemployment benefit and income support has not always done that, and it is not providing that help now. The system contains disincentives to work. It is complex and out of date and it can be confusing for claimants. It fails, above all, to target help on those who most need it.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): The Minister mentioned the disincentives to work in the current unemployment benefit regulations. He is surely referring to the benefit

[Ms Angela Eagle]

traps that are created by the loss of income among people who move from a stable amount of benefit payments into paid work that may be quite low paid. Will he explain how the jobseeker's allowance exacerbates that problem by bringing forward means testing from 12 months to six months? Does not that create a positive incentive for the partners of people who are means-tested after six months to give up their part-time jobs?

Mr. Forth: I do not believe that that disincentive operates, because we are improving the position for couples, or people with partners. The change from 12 months to six months will not have the effect that the hon. Lady describes because, as she knows—and as was well rehearsed during the passage of the Jobseekers Act 1995—happily the bulk of people who find themselves out of work are back in work within a six-month period. That fact, combined with the detailed, improved provisions in the regulations, especially for couples or people with partners, means that the effect suggested by the hon. Lady will not occur.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): Surely the Minister's arguments lead in the opposite direction. If most people are back in work within six months, why bring in the change? The change is necessary only if most people are still out of work after six months.

Mr. Forth: That does not follow. As the hon. Gentleman knows better than almost anyone in the House, the current regime was designed and has operated for many years in very different circumstances. What we have attempted to do by introducing the jobseeker's allowance, with its many different provisions, is to reflect the current position as accurately as possible. Therefore, as most people find work within the six-month period, we felt that it was appropriate that the regime should reflect that as far as possible.

I do not deny—I do not think it has ever been denied—that there is a balance in the regulations that means that some will gain from them and others will not. That is inevitable when one makes a change. I stand behind the provision—in the Act, not the regulations—on the six-month cut-off period. In a sense, that is not negotiable. It may be debatable, but it is not contained in the regulations.

The existing regime can be seen as having been designed to support people who are out of work, but unemployed people want help to get back to work. That is what the jobseeker's allowance seeks to do and that is what the regulations are about.

In the White Paper in October 1994, the Government set out the three main aims for the new benefit regime. First, we aim to improve the operation of the labour market by helping people in their search for work, while ensuring as far as possible that they understand and fulfil the conditions for the receipt of benefit. The JSA emphasises the responsibilities of unemployed people to take every advantage of the opportunities open to them to get back to work.

Secondly, we aim to secure better value for money for the taxpayer by streamlining administration; by closer targeting on those who need financial support; and by introducing a regime that more effectively helps them to find jobs.

Thirdly, we aim to improve the service that we give to unemployed people through a clearer, more coherent benefit structure and a better integration of the payment of benefits with the delivery of help and advice to find work. We want to give jobseekers the most effective and up-to-date system that we can devise. Through the new labour market computer system, employment advisers will have unprecedented access to information on vacancies and other opportunities so that they can be matched against the individual needs of the jobseeker. We have taken great pains to ascertain and to meet those needs.

In achieving those aims with the implementation of the JSA in October this year, we expect to make jobs—the pursuit of jobs and the winning of jobs—the focus of our efforts on behalf of unemployed people.

Our proposals were debated at length, in the House and in another place, during the passage of the Jobseekers Act 1995. The regulations provide a further level of detail and set out the rules that will apply when the allowance is introduced in October. In view of those earlier debates and the extensive nature of the regulations, I thought it best to cover matters in a general and relatively brief introductory speech. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans), and I will of course listen carefully to comments made during the debate, and my hon. Friend will respond to as many of the questions raised as possible.

At the heart of the allowance are the labour market tests, which are designed to ensure that all jobseekers are open to as many as job opportunities as possible and are making all reasonable efforts to find work. There will be no change in the jobseeker's allowance to the basic availability condition that people must be willing and able to take up immediately any offer of employment. That has been a requirement for unemployment benefits for a long time. But the regulations do require, for the first time, that claimants should usually be available for employment for at least 40 hours a week; and that when they restrict the hours for which they are available, they should be able to agree an individual pattern of availability across the week. That flexibility is very much in line with the current labour market.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Can people in the tops of trees be described as available for work?

Mr. Forth: I was wondering which of my colleagues would be the first to raise that matter—I am not surprised to find that it is my hon. Friend. As she would expect, we have looked into it. I am satisfied that the Employment Service in the area where the difficulties have arisen—around Newbury—is treating everyone with the same fair-minded and even-handed approach that we would expect of that service. In other words, anyone receiving benefit from or through the local jobcentre will indeed be expected to demonstrate his availability for work and the fact that he is actively seeking work.

Some people have had their benefits disallowed because they have been unable to meet the conditions; others have been able, so far, to satisfy the jobcentre that they can meet the conditions applied to everyone. There may be some rather unusual circumstances at times. After all, one of the features of the current regime and of the jobseeker's allowance is that people are recognised as

having hugely varying circumstances. We do not want to treat people in the mass; we have a flexible enough regime to deal sympathetically but firmly with people's varying circumstances. That is as it should be, as it is, and as it will be under the proposals in the Act and in the regulations.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Will the local Employment Service take these people's word for it that they are not taking part in the political activity? How will their good faith be tested? If there is evidence, photographic or otherwise, that they are taking part in the demonstrations, will the Employment Service be able to use it to disallow their benefits?

Mr. Forth: I have to be slightly careful when answering that question, because I must not intrude on the well-established relationship between Ministers and agencies. It is the responsibility of the Employment Service properly to implement the rules. As far as I am aware, taking part in what my hon. Friend describes as "political activity" will not in itself disqualify someone from eligibility for benefit. The key is availability for work and the fact that someone is actively seeking employment.

Political activity may sometimes be compatible with availability for work and with actively seeking it. A Member of Parliament seeking work might—who knows?—be able to do both things at the same time. I well understand the concern of many people about the fact that taxpayers' money in the form of benefits is being given to those indulging in activities of which we might not approve. That is not the test, however. The test in the rules, applied even-handedly and fairly, is whether people—regardless of their views and political activities—meet the requirements laid down for everyone in those rules. I am assured by the Employment Service—I am prepared to accept its assurance—that it is applying the rules even-handedly to everyone concerned.

Whether the Employment Service accepts a particular type of evidence is a matter for the service, but I should have thought it highly likely, if evidence came the way of the local jobcentre, that it would make it its business to look at it and then make a judgment.

Mr. Leigh: Of course we all accept that a person can be looking for work at the same as engaging in political activities—attending political meetings in the evenings and so on—but these people are devoting themselves full time to disrupting others in their lawful activities. They are clearly not available for work, so Conservative Members would be grateful for my hon. Friend's assurance—I think he has already given it—that evidence that people are taking part in these activities, which are full time by their very nature, will be held against them; and that they will be made to understand that they will immediately lose all their benefits.

Mr. Forth: What my hon. Friend may know that I do not, is whether the people engaging in full-time activity are in receipt of benefit.

Mr. Leigh: They are.

Mr. Forth: If my hon. Friend has evidence of that, I hope that he will let me have it and I shall certainly pass it on to the jobcentre. I cannot assume—it would be wrong of me to do so—that everyone we see on television and in the newspapers engaging in the sort of activity of which he and I might well not approve is in receipt of benefit. Equally, we are not sure whether those who are receiving benefit are participating only occasionally in those activities and are otherwise available for work and seeking it. I do not know that; the local jobcentre assures me that it does. Unless my hon. Friend can provide me with evidence, which I should be happy to pass on, there I must leave it.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): Surely we are not going down the road of taking the lawful right to demonstrate away from someone because he is on the dole. I hope that we are not going down that road.

Mr. Forth: At the moment, I fear that we are not going down any road—that is the point at issue. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is satisfied from what I have said that there is no question of taking away that right. We must not confuse being available for and actively seeking work with someone's views, political activities and the like. I hope that that is not the case now and, from my point of view, I hope that it never will be. I am happy to give the hon. Gentleman that reassurance.

Mr. Campbell: I was worried about that.

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman must not worry. The matter is safe in my hands.

To follow on from the points that have just been made, the regulations make provision for people wanting to restrict their availability on religious or conscientious grounds, for those with caring responsibilities for children or sick or elderly relatives and for people with disabilities. In line with the commitments that we made during the passage of the Jobseekers Bill, disabled people may restrict their availability in any way, provided that the restrictions are reasonable in the light of their physical or mental condition.

Having said that, jobseekers must actively seek employment in every week that they are unemployed. In this, we are making no significant departures from an approach which, since the benefit reforms of the 1980s, has become accepted as a key responsibility of claimants. We want jobseekers to be more flexible in their approach to the search for work, so the regulations broaden the range of steps expected of a claimant so that they include actions to improve prospects of employment, such as drawing up a curriculum vitae or seeking specialist advice. At the same time, we are ensuring that jobseekers who deliberately undermine their chances of finding work may be penalised. As a new condition of entitlement, claimants must enter—

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): The Minister said that he is introducing some new flexibilities to take into account people improving their prospects of employment. What view are the Government taking of an appropriate eligibility for benefit for people engaged in study and training that is designed to improve their skills in the labour market? The present system penalises people who choose to study and to improve their opportunities in the knowledge-based economy—an economy in which people's personal opportunities depend increasingly on their intellectual skills—which is perverse. Have the Government been able to introduce changes or do they contemplate any changes to encourage people to study, rather than penalising them for doing so?

Mr. Forth: I suppose that I am fortunate that that question is aimed at both my responsibilities—the

[Mr. Forth]

hon. Gentleman probably skilfully designed it so—and I accept it as such. The direct response is that we are not seeking to use the jobseeker's allowance as a vehicle to improve the support for those who are studying. That is the straightforward answer. There are more detailed considerations. We are clarifying the detailed requirements for people who are studying—guided hours and so forth—in line with the Further Education Funding Council, with which the hon. Gentleman is familiar. The answer to his question, however, is that it is not our intention to use the regulations, or indeed the provisions of the Jobseekers Act 1995, which covers them, to provide some sort of new regime to support people who are studying. That is for another time and it is part of my other responsibilities. I certainly believe that it is something to which the House and the Government will have to return.

Our "Lifetime Learning" consultation document raises questions in that regard. We shall examine the replies that we receive and the overall provision through higher and further education and full and part-time study, to see how best we can define the responsibilities between individuals, institutions and the taxpayer to promote the development of skills and qualifications.

Mr. Howarth: I am grateful to the Minister for that thoughtful and serious reply. He said that he did not envisage that the powers provided under the legislation gave any positive enhancement of the incentives for people to study. Can he at least give an assurance that no penalties will be imposed upon people who decide to study—for example, that the jobseeker's directions, reinforced by benefit sanctions, will not be used to require unemployed people to take a Government-provided course that would interrupt or prevent them from pursuing a course of study on which they had already embarked, or which they reasonably judge may be more useful to equip them with skills to enter employment?

Mr. Forth: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman such an assurance in the form in which he is seeking it. The form of words that he used would provide an almost total discretion and give the individual carte blanche to say, "I believe that what I am doing is best for me, therefore, by implication, I expect you, the taxpayer, through the benefit regime to support me in doing that for as long as I consider that it is beneficial."

Mr. Howarth: I said that there should be reasonable discretion.

Mr. Forth: Even with the word "reasonable", that approach would open up far too widely a responsibility on the taxpayer to fund almost any study that any individual considered beneficial. We cannot approach the matter from that direction. We have to approach it from a different direction that will better define the areas and vehicles for study, self-improvement and the acquisition of skills and qualifications, and identify the best means of financing them. We shall have to consider where the responsibilities should lie—with individuals, institutions, employers or the taxpayer, or more probably a combination of them all. Although those are important matters, with respect, I do not consider that they can or should be resolved through the vehicle of the regulations before the House today.

Ms Eagle: Can the Minister confirm that, under the 16-hour rule, the regulations will force students who may be just approaching an examination to participate in a Government programme and be unable to attend their course, even at a crucial time in that course, so that they can be taught how to look for work? That seems rather absurd.

Mr. Forth: The hon. Lady understands that the requirements now and under the jobseeker's allowance mean that a person must take a job if one becomes available. If we devised more individual circumstances in which not taking a job would be permissible, we should end up not just back where we started, but further back beyond that. I am not prepared—and it is not appropriate, even during today's debate—to invent new rules to make matters different, easier or better for certain prescribed groups of people. Therefore, I cannot give the hon. Lady the undertaking that she seeks.

I move on to a key part of the process. As a new condition of entitlement, claimants must enter into a jobseeker's agreement with the Employment Service. Each agreement will be individually tailored, recording how each jobseeker will be available for work and the best route for him or her to find a job. The agreement will ensure that jobseekers have information about the expert advice and services available at jobcentres. Trials of a prototype of the agreement have already been conducted in some jobcentres, with very encouraging reactions from jobseekers.

Many of the provisions relating to the agreement and the access to independent adjudication for the resolution of disputes lie within the Act. The regulations before us today, however, cover a number of more minor details such as the prescribed contents and the circumstances relevant to the backdating of an agreement.

While the vast majority of unemployed people make every effort to find work, we need effective measures against the minority who perhaps do not. Social security law has always included penalties for those who break the rules. It is wholly reasonable that people who pay taxes should not subsidise those, however few in number, who make little attempt to get a job. The sanctions regime in the jobseeker's allowance will make it crystal clear that persons who do not meet their obligations will suffer a loss of benefit. The 1995 Act sets out those obligations and the sanctions that may be imposed, but it also recognises that sanctions should not be imposed where a jobseeker has good cause for his actions in, for example, refusing the offer of a job or a place on an employment course.

The regulations set out the circumstances that we expect independent adjudication officers to consider and the circumstances in which a jobseeker is to be regarded as having good cause. A balance must also be struck between protecting the taxpayer and protecting vulnerable individuals from loss of benefit, which may subject them to unreasonable hardship. We shall protect persons most at risk of hardship. Claimants with children, who are sick, disabled or pregnant or who have partners in that position, and those with caring responsibilities will at any time be able to receive reduced payments if they would otherwise suffer hardship. They are also protected against delays in the system of deciding entitlement to benefit. The regulations provide for the making of hardship payments and identify the circumstances in which a person is to be regarded as being in hardship.

The Government also guarantee a suitable youth training place to every young person under the age of 18 who wants one. We are spending £676 million on youth training this year in England alone. That means that there is no reason for young people needing to be unemployed. We do not wish to encourage dependency on benefit at such an early age. The Government's guarantee to 16 to 17-year-olds removes the need for general access to benefits. The current approach in income support will be continued in the jobseeker's allowance. We recognise that there are circumstances in which young people need to claim benefits. We provide for them, and will continue to do so in the JSA.

The regulations provide that young people in vulnerable groups—for example, those who have recently left local authority care—will be able to claim JSA for a period, to allow them to overcome their temporary difficulties. Young people who are waiting for a suitable youth training place will be able to claim JSA if they would otherwise suffer severe hardship. But at the same time we aim to improve the help and service to young people. A specially tailored jobseeker's agreement will be introduced. That will reflect the Government's commitment to the importance of training for young people. It will build on a form completed at the careers service and will include details of the type of training and work that the young person is seeking and the action agreed to achieve his goals. The vital role of the careers service will continue, but as part now of a two-stop service—young persons need have contact only with the careers service and the jobcentre to make a claim for jobseeker's allowance. They will no longer have to attend the Benefits Agency as well.

The new allowance will provide financial help for unemployed people and their dependants according to their needs, and that will be paid as long as they need it. Persons who have paid national insurance contributions will receive a personal rate, irrespective of their capital or their partner's earnings, for up to six months—the point at which the majority of jobseekers leave unemployment. We expect that the majority of unemployed people will receive the income-related element of JSA. In bringing together the contributory and income-related elements in the one benefit, we shall provide a single coherent benefit for unemployed people. There will be an end to the confusion when unemployed people could be entitled to one or the other benefit handled by different agencies or both benefits at the same time.

Much of the content of the regulations deals with the assessment of the amount of benefit to which people are entitled—for example, regulations dealing with the applicable amounts and the treatment of income, capital or earnings. In the majority of cases, we have had the example of income support to follow. But there will be some significant updating and improvements to income support provisions. For instance, we shall provide new help for couples, enabling partners of JSA and income support claimants to work for up to 24 hours, not 16 as now. We believe that that will encourage partners to remain in or to take part-time work. Couples will also be able to earn £10 without their allowance being affected, even if only one is working.

Many unemployed people get substantial occupational pensions from their previous employer. Pensions are already fully taken into account in income support, and it is right that larger occupational and personal pensions should reduce the amount of contributory benefit for people of any age. The present limit is too severe, so we are removing the arbitrary age threshold and raising the amount of pension that can be paid without affecting benefit, from £35 to £50 a week.

Throughout the passage of the Jobseekers Bill, we emphasised that JSA should be seen as part of a far-reaching package of work incentive measures. The other sets of regulations before the House today complete the picture.

The unemployment and poverty traps have been significantly alleviated over recent years. Only a tiny proportion of the working population would not now be better off in work than remaining on out-of-work benefits. This imaginative package of regulations addresses three big issues. It gives direct encouragement to unemployed people to undertake part-time work and to use that as a stepping stone to full-time work. It removes uncertainty at the point of moving into work, encouraging employers to look more favourably on the long-term unemployed.

The back-to-work bonus is a clear demonstration of our resolve to remove disincentives within the benefit system. At present, unemployed people who take part-time jobs can lose benefit almost pound for pound. Yet if they could keep their part-time earnings on top of their benefit, they would surely have little incentive to go on to full-time work. The back-to-work bonus squares the circle. It is a far more effective measure than the calls that are sometimes made to raise earnings disregards across the board, because it is more targeted.

Jobseekers and their partners who take small amounts of work while on benefit can build up entitlement to a lump sum bonus of up to £1,000. They can cash that in when they move off benefit into work. We shall also pay the bonus to people who move off JSA at pension age and at the age of 60 to income support claimants who have participated in the scheme so that the bonus will not be lost.

Following commitments that were made during the passage of the enabling legislation, we are providing for extensive linking rules to protect the position of many people who leave JSA for incapacity benefit during long periods of sickness or disability. We expect to pay at least 150,000 bonuses to JSA claimants each year once the scheme is up and running. It will encourage people to stay in touch with the world of work while they are on benefit and to keep their skills up to date, and it will give claimants a financial boost at a crucial time by helping them to meet the expenses connected with the move back to work.

Building on the incentives for the long-term unemployed already provided by programmes funded by my Department, the regulations provide for a national insurance contribution holiday for up to 12 months for employers who employ someone who has been out of work for two years or more. That will encourage employers to take on long-term unemployed people. We estimate that about 120,000 people are likely to be helped by the scheme, and it is worth about £50 million to employers in national insurance savings.

In that context, I commend to the House the Housing Benefit, Supply of Information and Council Tax Benefit (Amendment) Regulations. Those regulations underpin the measures being introduced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to enable housing and council tax benefits to run on for four weeks regardless of earnings for people who leave unemployment for work.

[Mr. Forth]

The purpose of the measure is twofold. First, it protects the claimant from the gap in income that currently causes concern and difficulties on returning to work—a fear that I recognise can sometimes act as a deterrent to taking a job. Secondly, it ensures that local authorities give priority to dealing with continuing housing benefit and council tax benefit claims from those who take advantage from the run-on. That means that entitlement to benefit is established before the end of the four-week period and there is no gap in housing benefit if an individual continues to be entitled to it.

The House should be aware that the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments has drawn the special attention of the House to the JSA regulations. I am happy to say that the Committee has identified only one aspect. The fifth report has drawn attention to regulation 150, where there are two printers' errors in the formulae, and has reported regulation 152 as being defectively drafted to both Houses.

The formula contained in regulation 150(1)(a) should read N multiplied by A divided by 7. Similarly, the formula in regulation 150(1)(b) should appear as N multiplied by (A minus 1) divided by 7 minus B.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Forth: I hoped that I would not be asked a question.

Mr. Howarth: The implications of the text that the Minister has read to the House are clearly considerable and important. As the House does not have power to amend the regulations, what will he do about the errors?

Mr. Forth: I am assured that the rather unusual procedure in which I am now engaged will enable us to correct the regulations. That is why I am detaining the House, but only for another minute or two. I am sure that I have been correctly advised. I hope that Opposition Members will accept that in good faith we are trying to find a way to ensure that the regulations emerge from our process properly and in the way intended, and are not vulnerable to a printing error.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Forth: Yes, if the hon. Gentleman is not happy with my response.

Mr. Blunkett: Is the Minister saying that reading into the record a change that the Joint Committee has requested will ensure that the change will be made, irrespective of the fact that we are not able to amend the regulations this afternoon?

Mr. Forth: The Joint Committee has identified a printing error in the regulations, and I have been advised that there is a way to correct that. I should like, if I may, to take further advice on that. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary can return to it.

I hope that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) and his colleagues will accept that it is the desire of the House that a printing error in regulations as important as these, and which are so important to individuals, should be corrected. I have been advised in good faith that there is a method so to do. If Opposition Members are unhappy with that, they are, of course, entitled to pursue the matter. However, if we could not correct the regulations this way, I should be very unhappy if they had to emerge from the House in an unsatisfactory condition, particularly when they refer to a formula that could affect people's entitlement to benefit.

Ms Eagle *rose—*

Mr. Frank Field *rose—*

Mr. Alan Howarth *rose—*

Mr. Forth: I give way seriatim to Opposition Members, starting, of course, with the hon. Lady.

Ms Eagle: I thank the Minister for giving way to me first. I hope that he is doing so alphabetically rather than for any other reason.

Perhaps the Minister will explain the difference between the formula—with the so-called printing error that has appeared in the regulations—and the amendment that he is seeking to read into the record, and what it means in practice, rather than just reading out mathematical formulae.

Mr. Forth: It is concerned with the meaning of the term N, which is a definition of the week, or the number of days, which then gives rise to the calculation of benefit entitlement. All that we are trying to do is ensure that the formula is correct and that its meaning is correct in the terms of the regulations. It is one of the ways in which benefit entitlement is calculated, and that is why I want to go to these rather extraordinary lengths to ensure that it is correct. There is no more and no less to it than that. The error has arisen, of course, after the report of the Joint Committee, which we are trying to follow in spirit.

Mr. Frank Field: What the Minister is saying could not be more important. He suggests to the House that we should not pass regulations that are wrong, but he hopes that by reading a correction into the record all will be well. If we discover that the Minister cannot change the regulations merely by standing at the Dispatch Box and reading something different from what they say, as a result of which they will emerge wrongly, should we agree them? Is he suggesting that he will withdraw them? As he said, he has no wish for the regulations to be passed today if they are wrong.

Mr. Forth: Subject to advice, I think that I would still have to ask the House to approve the regulations today, including the error. I would ask the House to approve the regulations with this small drafting error, which has arisen from a printing mistake—

Mr. Field: It is a small error that affects benefits.

Mr. Forth: If the hon. Gentleman will wait, I shall answer his question.

I envisage that I would then have to introduce amending regulations subsequently to correct the error.

Subject to further advice that I may take, I or my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will seek to clarify the matter for the House. I have no desire to confuse. Nor do I have any desire to undermine the authority of the House. I hope that Opposition Members will accept this in good faith. If it is found that this approach is not reasonable or,

indeed, that it is in breach of any of the rules of the House, I shall still ask the House to approve the regulations and will then proceed with amending regulations subsequently. I think that that would be less satisfactory, given the enormity and complexity of implementing the jobseeker's allowance across the country.

I hope that Opposition Members will bear with me and that during the debate, or perhaps in his winding-up speech, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will return to that matter with further advice. I can understand the points raised by Opposition Members. I am attempting only to get this right.

Mr. Field: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. How long must we exist in our present limbo, not knowing whether the regulations that we are approving are wrong or right? Should we not know that now?

Madam Speaker: The Minister is attempting, in good faith, to help the House as much as he can. He has explained his position. It is a printing error; that is all. He has said that, between now and the winding-up speeches, the Minister who will wind up the debate will have time to make the position clear. The Minister who is now at the Dispatch Box is doing his best to deal with a little difficulty involving a printing error. I think that the House should be tolerant, and wait a while until the Government have been able to make a clear statement. The Minister hopes to do that shortly.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to you, Madam Speaker. Let me continue what I was saying in the spirit in which I began, for the sake of completeness.

The correct formulae are reproduced in a memorandum sent yesterday to the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments by the Department of Social Security, attached as an annexe to the fifth report. As both mistakes resulted from a printer's error, we undertake to correct them in the version of the regulations that will be published subject to the approval of both Houses.

As for the defective drafting, it appears that printing gremlins have also got into the Joint Committee's system. The definition of the variable N for whose absence regulation 152 was reported as being defectively drafted is, in fact, missing from regulation 151. As the Committee pointed out, the meaning of N is reasonably clear, but should nevertheless have been included. For the avoidance of doubt, let me explain that N should be defined as the number of days in the part week. That partly answers the question posed by the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle). I should like to give an undertaking—subject to the guidance that you have given us, Madam Speaker—that the deficiency will be corrected by means of an amending instrument as soon as possible.

I am about to end my speech. If any hon. Members are not happy with what I have said—or, dare I say, with what Madam Speaker said—

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North-East): I shall come back another day.

Mr. Forth: I shall quit while I am behind.

We are debating an extensive and far-reaching package of legislation, but the regulations have one simple common theme: the Government's commitment to offer every help, encouragement and incentive to unemployed people to find work as quickly as possible. We already offer 1.5 million opportunities to unemployed people on Government programmes, and will continue that commitment next year. I am happy to say that the Employment Service is already placing a record number of people in jobs; we want to build on its achievement, and the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance will further that success.

I commend the regulations to the House, subject to further advice that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary or I may wish to give.

4.22 pm

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): On 24 January last year, the Jobseekers Bill commenced its stormy passage through Standing Committee. During the Committee's first sitting, I described the actions of the then Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo), as inequitable and monstrous. The regulations with which we are dealing today lay to rest any pretence that the Tories are a party with one-nation values.

Both here and in the other place, the Bill was criticised for its lack of appropriate detail, before and after its enactment. In truth, the Act was a mere skeleton; all the vital issues and draconian measures contained in it were removed from public awareness and parliamentary scrutiny. If the motion is passed, the Secretary of State will have 116 powers to control the lives of the unemployed without further recourse to the House. Expansively drafted catch-all clauses, to be implemented by non-negotiable and, at the time of the Bill, non-defined regulations, would prescribe circumstances leading to the loss or reduction of benefit for upwards of a quarter of a million unemployed people and their families.

This contemptuous sleight of hand, devised to evade parliamentary scrutiny and deceive the public about the real purposes of the legislation, was forced through the House with all the subtlety of an elephant sitting on a pinhead. The Bill was badly drafted, ill thought out and socially divisive—51 pages of legislative vitriol directed at innocent victims of the Government's failed economic and social policies. Following scant consultation, the Government revealed the real Act under the guise of the regulations. They are a mesmerising 160 pages long, have 13 parts, 172 regulations and eight schedules. To that can be added a sprinkling of back-to-work regulations. The Act had only 51 pages and contained three parts, 41 clauses and three schedules.

The regulations are controversial and technical, but they will be forced through the House in approximately two and a half hours' time. The whole process brings Parliament into disrepute, and demeans this place as a democratic legislature. During the Minister's speech there were points of order and he asked us to bear with him. During the passage of the Bill, there was a complete negation of all attempts at dialogue with Opposition Members, behind the scenes, across the Dispatch Box or in Committee, about the nature of the regulations. All attempts, whether with the Minister of State or the Under-Secretary of State, to have such a relationship were rejected out of hand.

I want some clarification. If the Minister can seek by a verbal statement to amend the regulations, is it possible for the Opposition to do likewise? At least one regulation

[Mr. Ian McCartney]

is seriously defective. If I am correct, it renders another two regulations ineffective, or at least in need of redrafting or of being withdrawn altogether.

If there is to be such an arrangement, as a matter of principle it must be for all hon. Members. If the Minister knew about this matter before he came to the House, he should at least have had the courtesy to consult behind the Chair and elsewhere with my right hon. Friends who have Opposition responsibility for the business of the House. If that had been done, perhaps we would be a little more forgiving about the shambles that the Minister outlined at the end of his speech.

The shambles does not stop there. In the Bill, the Minister claimed savings to the Exchequer of £410 million in the financial years 1996-98. That was reduced to a net saving of £320 million after taking into account measures relating to the national insurance contribution rebate.

So ill planned has been the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance regulations that the costs of implementation have escalated. On 8 November 1995, I questioned the Minister of State about the implementation cost, and I was advised in a written answer that it was £270 million for the four main areas of implementation. The cost for information technology was £110 million; for training, it was £70 million; for premises, £45 million; and for project management and communications, £45 million.

No costs were given for other areas of implementation. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) wheedled out of the Minister a further range of figures relative to implementation costs. A sum of £979,000, rising to £2.147 million, was for private consultancy fees and advice. Just as worrying as the private sector consultancy financial bonanza was the Minister's statement that he could give no firm figure for the additional support costs.

We have had the revelation that to tart up the fading image of Department for Education and Employment Ministers, they spent a total in the past five years of more than £74 million on furnishings, carpets and curtains in the Department. That gave the staggering total of £346,329,791 as the cost of implementing this so-called legislation. Even if we take out the cost of carpets and furnishings, the costs so far, with the meter still ticking, are near to £320 million, reducing the savings to about £40 million. And for what?

Mr. Forth: It is difficult to imagine how the hon. Gentleman thinks that Ministers in the Department could sit on £73 million-worth of furniture. I hope that he accepts that, rightly in my view, we upgrade the quality of accommodation for officials working in the Department and in the jobcentres and make jobcentres fit for people to work in and for claimants to come to receive advice.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that there is anything wrong with placing contracts with expert outside private consultants to help in the implementation of a system as complex as this. If he imagines that it could be done without them, I should like to know how he thinks it would be possible.

Mr. McCartney: I shall deal with the last point first. It would have helped the House if it had been informed of the cost of private consultancies, and if implementation costs had been subject to public scrutiny. Secondly, the vast majority of jobseekers and unemployed people believe that the Government would do better to squeeze the budget for new chairs rather than budgets for training and other job creation activities.

At one point in the summer, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment was, we understand, offered three options on the regulations—to scrap them, to introduce further delay or to implement them in a less sophisticated form. She was also told, at all costs, to prevent another Child Support Agency debacle. Such is the Government's loathing for unemployed people that they are blundering on regardless.

Chapter II of the regulations, which deals with availability for employment, had a mini run-out in yesterday's debate on training. The Secretary of State claimed, in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), that the Government had worked an economic miracle and had got rid of the north-south divide—and so they have, but in a uniquely Tory way: not by decreasing unemployment, poverty and insecurity in the north, but by dramatically increasing them in the south.

From the time when the Prime Minister took office to his relaunch at last year's Tory conference, we have witnessed the scale of the problems that the regulations in chapter II are supposedly designed to deal with. In the south-east, unemployment has increased by 82 per cent. In Greater London, it has rocketed by 73 per cent. In East Anglia, the message is much the same—it is up by 61 per cent.—and in the south-west it has increased by 55 per cent.

In the country as a whole, unemployment has increased by 32 per cent., and among young people it has grown by 23 per cent. Among those out of work for at least six months, it has increased by 54 per cent. In Great Britain, in the past five years, long-term unemployment has gone up by 70 per cent. More than 1 million people are still out of work compared with when the Prime Minister took office.

Figures released today show that vacancies are down by 3,400 and that an average of 12 people chase each advertised vacancy in Britain. In London, the average is 20 for each vacancy, and in the north it is 18 for each vacancy. That is the real extent of mass unemployment in the United Kingdom. That is the real problem we face, but these regulations do not recognise it.

The real cost of unemployment is more than £23 billion—equivalent to 4.6 per cent. of our gross domestic product and to almost two thirds of the Government's current borrowing. Without Government borrowing to finance mass unemployment between 1990 and today, the basic income tax rate would have had to increase from 25 to 30 per cent.—taxing for failure instead of investing for success.

With that record, the Government deserve no plaudits for the minuscule reduction in the benefit claimant count, especially in view of the fiddled nature of the figures. Independent Library estimates show that 900,000 unemployed people are no longer included in any Government measure of the true level of unemployment.

What is the Government's response?

Mr. Forth: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that the labour force survey figures or the figures produced by the

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and by the European Union are all wrong? He will know that they all mirror closely our claimant count figures for people in work and those out of work.

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. In its entirety, the labour force survey reflects what has been said by the House of Commons Library: that about 900,000 to 1 million unemployed people are not included in the Government's measure of unemployment. In the past 12 months, we have already had an inquiry and report saying that the way in which the Government are conducting their so-called count of the unemployed is unsatisfactory and does not accurately reflect the real unemployment figure. It recommended that the Government should change the way in which the number of unemployed people is recorded. There has been a deafening silence from the Minister since that independent report was published.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McCartney: I shall give way in a minute.

What has been the Government's response? Has it been to invest in training? No. That has been cut by 50 per cent. in real terms. Schemes have closed with alarming regularity. Many of the programmes are ineffective in helping unemployed people to gain access to the labour market. Have the Government ended insecurity at work? They have not done that either. Insecurity is a plague across the nation.

No one, and I mean no one, has job security any more. The jobseeker's allowance, the supposed miracle cure, means what? The costs have escalated since its symbolic introduction. There is no genuine assistance for people to gain access to employment. Instead, additional benefit traps have been introduced that empower the Minister to reduce the period for unemployment benefit from 12 to six months.

Let us put the record straight—we are talking about a national insurance contribution scheme. People have paid thousands of pounds over many years to provide benefit should they become unemployed. Yet, at the same time as cutting the benefit period, the Government have increased national insurance contributions. They have awarded themselves a windfall increase of £2 billion in taxation, while cutting benefits for which people have already paid.

If it were a private sector insurance scheme, the provider would be in the High Court for breach of contract. It is scandalous that, having taken thousands of pounds of national insurance contributions from millions of people, the Government are now cutting the benefit period from 12 to six months.

Mr. Duncan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way now?

Mr. McCartney: Sit down. I will give way to the hon. Gentleman in a minute. I will give him more chances than he would ever give the unemployed.

After six months, there will be no benefit for people with partners in full-time jobs, and reduced benefit for people with partners in part-time jobs. That is a real disincentive for low-paid workers on minimum wages. Irrespective of their level of income, if they work more than 24 hours a week, they will be required either to give up their jobs and go on to benefit or to maintain the partner, irrespective of that partner's financial circumstances. That will disproportionately hit women in employment.

There will be no benefit after six months for people with more than £8,000 savings. That is a real attack on middle England, at a time when job insecurity and joblessness are rising in some sectors of banking and insurance. Those who receive more than £8,000 in redundancy payments will, after six months, have to maintain themselves, because they will receive no benefit. For those with £3,000 savings, after six months there will be a cut in benefit—despite the fact that they may have paid thousands of pounds into the national insurance fund.

Mr. Duncan: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way at last. If he believes that the unemployment figures, including those released today, are unduly optimistic, will he categorically confirm that, if Labour ever came to power, it would immediately revise the basis on which the figures are calculated, resulting in the higher figure that he believes to be valid?

Mr. McCartney: Let us get the language correct—today's unemployment figures are a disaster, because more than 2.3 million people are unemployed. It is nonsense to say that the figures are good. I remind the hon. Gentleman that, in Committee and on the Floor of the House, I have twice given a commitment that a Labour Government would implement the recommendations of the independent inquiry. I ask the Minister to give a similar commitment and bring some common sense, understanding and legitimacy to labour market figures. I have given a clear and precise commitment to do so after the general election.

People undertaking study to improve their chances of obtaining a job will be hit, because the 20-hour rule will become the 16-hour rule. There will be no automatic increase in JSA in line with inflation, so the principle of state unemployment benefit will wither on the vine. The regulations say nothing about that; it is not something that the Government have trumpeted. However, for the first time, the Act will remove the legal requirement for the annual uprating of unemployment benefit in line with inflation.

The setting of the next JSA level will remain in place not for one or two years, but for three, four or five years, thus dramatically reducing the actual value of the benefit, despite the contributions paid by the recipients. That is the first step towards removing the concept in principle of the state being involved in the funding of unemployed people.

The truncated time available for this debate prevents me from going into greater detail about the regulations, and I therefore give notice to the Secretary of State that I shall be putting before her in the coming days a significant number of questions in order to clarify a range of ambiguities thrown up by the regulations, some of which seem contrary to guarantees given during the passage of the Bill. The questions will cover areas including young people, new jobseekers, age-related distinctions, and definitions of "seriously ill", "low pay", "actively seeking work", "variation of the jobseeker's agreement", "good cause", and "part-time study".

For the moment, I shall seek clarification in five areas of the regulations. Regulation 9 is about low pay. I call it the no-pay regulation. It describes the basis on which

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people may be offered a job for £1 an hour after—we thought—13 weeks, and if they do not take it, they lose their right to benefit. That regulation opens up the labour market to cowboy employers, to impose any level of wages, irrespective of the individuals' skills.

The regulation states that, after six months,

"a person may not restrict his availability for employment by placing restrictions on the level of remuneration in employment for which he is available."

Does that mean that, in that six-month period, a person can restrict his availability for employment by restricting the level of remuneration in employment for which he is available? That is what the regulation implies, yet it clearly contradicts regulation 16 on the permitted period, and regulation 72(7)(a) relating to sanctions for refusing a job offer because of the level of remuneration.

Is regulation 9 the result of having to meet international labour law requirements? If so, the Social Security Act 1989, which introduced the permitted period and the regulations preventing claimants from refusing job offers after 13 weeks because of low wage levels, was a contravention of International Labour Organisation regulations.

If regulation 9 is linked to international labour law, preventing disqualification from national insurance or employment benefit for refusing low-paid job offers, it raises serious questions about claimants penalised in such circumstances since the implementation of the 1989 Act.

I know that detail bores the Minister—we could tell that from his speech—but it is not boring for those it affects. After study of the regulations, crucial points arise—more serious than the spelling errors he mentioned.

A regulation similar to regulation 9 covering unemployment benefit would have protected claimants from being disqualified during the first 12 months of unemployment for refusing a low-paid job if they were in receipt of unemployment benefit. If that is the case, the Government have been wrongfully disqualifying claimants for periods of up to six months since the 1989 Act was implemented in 1990. I would like some legal clarification on that. It could have serious implications for thousands of benefit recipients, as well as the Government's financial commitments in the Budget to the paying of benefits.

Regulation 12 deals with volunteers. The Government agreed to conduct consultation following pressure during the passage of the Bill in another place, and I thank the Minister for carrying it out. There is, however, at least one unresolved question to be addressed.

The voluntary sector has given examples of considerable inconsistencies between employment offices in their interpretation of the regulations. That has led to a person in one part of the country being penalised for volunteering, while someone else is allowed to do exactly the same type of voluntary work and not be penalised. Will the Minister give details of the training that will be given to employment officers on the eligibility of volunteers for the jobseeker's allowance, so that consistency can be achieved?

During the passage of the Bill, I was given a commitment by the then Minister of State, Department of Employment, the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), that, from 1 April 1996, all staff training would be completed. Has that timetable been met or has it to be extended to, say, October? I would welcome information on that.

Regulation 18 deals with the so-called spoiling tactics of claimants. That provision was a shambles in Committee.

The then Minister argued against the wearing of earrings by certain job applicants, despite the fact that her civil service adviser, who was sitting 2 ft away from her, was wearing two earrings at the time. Now that the Minister is Minister of State at the Home Office, she is positively enthusiastic about the wearing of chains, although she is obviously still against the wearing of earrings by those claiming unemployment benefit.

Regulation 18(4) is particularly vague. It provides grounds on which claimants who otherwise meet the actively seeking work regulations can be disqualified. Employment staff can say that a claimant has an abusive manner or has spoiled the application form. They can say that his behaviour or appearance has undermined his prospects of securing the employment in question. During the passage of the Bill, spoiling an application form was not mentioned. Will people who are not proficient at filling out application forms be disqualified from benefit for that reason alone?

What standards will be used to determine what behaviour or appearance is suitable? Will the Secretary of State place in the public domain the Employment Service and adjudication officers' guidance on those issues?

What is involved is a matter of opinion rather than a matter of fact. If we are not careful, many people will be disqualified from benefit on the basis of factors that are outside the regulations, such as the length of their hair or their style of dress—whether they have a clean shirt on for the interview. There could be a shambolic number of complaints and appeals because of the wording of the regulations. It is important that the advice of adjudication officers and of the Employment Service is published and placed in the public domain.

Regulation 73 defines what is good cause for not attending a Government programme, and relates to the reduction from 21 hours to 16 hours. Again, the Minister owes us an adequate explanation. There is no provision in regulation 73, which covers people who are studying under the 16-hour rule, to protect people from being forced to give up their studies so that they can attend a Government programme, under threat of a benefit sanction.

Under the current system, Employment Service staff are advised to refer people in that position to compulsory re-motivation courses, such as restart and jobplan, during the vacations. Yet evidence suggests that that flexibility is rarely offered to claimants, and that the majority have their studies disrupted by attendance at those courses. If they do not attend the courses, they suffer a 40 per cent. deduction from their income support.

That has become an even greater problem with the introduction of workwise and worklink, the compulsory course for 18 to 24-year-olds. The course lasts for four weeks. Missing that amount of time from a part-time course can leave people with little opportunity to fulfil the coursework requirements. The jobseeker's allowance sanction for missing the compulsory courses will be much harsher, forcing more claimants to give up their studies to attend them.

In addition, the jobseeker's direction will enable Employment Service staff to instruct claimants to attend much longer Government programmes, such as training for work and job clubs. That will force more claimants to give up their part-time studies for inappropriate placements on Government schemes. How does that square with the Government's desire to improve access to skills to assist a person's employability?

A recent report, under the heading "Policy Analysis", says that there will be regional variations in the 16-hour rule, which will add further complexity to the regulations. Will the Minister give a clear explanation of the rules in Scotland and Northern Ireland? Why will the rules there be different from those applying to people studying for 16 hours in England? Why is there a change? Why was that change not explained clearly during the passage of the Jobseekers Bill?

Regulation 17 deals with workers on short time. Some workers whose companies are suffering difficulties, thanks to the Government's economic failures, temporarily stop work or are put on short-time working. At present, workers who are laid off temporarily or who work a certain number of days a week or weeks a month are allowed to claim unemployment benefit, and do not have to be available for work on the days when they are working at their normal jobs.

Under regulation 17, after a 13-week permitted period, a worker will be disqualified from benefit. To continue receiving benefit, claimants must be available for any job, irrespective of the fact that they are on short-time working for their employer. The rule will force workers who are temporarily laid off or who are working short time to give up their jobs. Many of those thus forced into unemployment will remain unemployed.

As I have said, most businesses that have introduced short-term working or laid off staff are in difficulties. For some, losing experienced staff will be the final straw, forcing them to make further redundancies among the remaining work force. I wrote to the Minister on this issue, but received a bit of a non-answer. Perhaps the implications of the regulation will be clarified during the passage of the Bill.

Regulation 63 deals with a range of issues affecting young people, on which I shall write to the Minister again. Why are the Government not giving a commitment during the passage of the legislation to help young people who are coming out of care and young people with special needs? The Minister said that the regulations protect them, but we know that the regulations will lead in some circumstances to vulnerable young people coming out of care—some without a family and some who may have been sexually or physically abused—being disbarred from benefit.

The regulations may also lead to a young person being sent on a training course or employment opportunity. If it is the second occasion on which the young person has been sent on such a course, there is no requirement on the employer to guarantee the quality of training, employment opportunities or the level of wages, and no prior check of the health and safety environment of the premises will be carried out by the Department. That is unacceptable in any circumstances, and I therefore ask the Minister to have another look at the young jobseeker's agreement and the complaints that we have consistently made about it.

The Government need a rethink, and there is an issue that I would like to raise that could form part of that rethink. In yesterday's debate on the cuts in training, I asked the Secretary of State to confirm the arrangements for the new project work pilots. She kindly confirmed to me that one of the two areas selected was the Medway travel-to-work area, which includes the constituency of the former Minister of State, Department of Employment, the hon. Member for Maidstone—the person largely responsible for this legislation.

I received a fax this morning advising me that that travel-to-work area was not the original choice for the pilot scheme, which had been an area in London. The fax alleges that, because unemployment in the hon. Lady's constituency has risen by 91 per cent. in the past five years—and by 39 per cent. in the marginal constituency next door—a lobbying exercise was undertaken by the former Employment Minister to ensure that the project was placed in her area, despite unease and unhappiness among Employment Service advisers. Perhaps, before the end of the debate, the Minister will clarify the process of placing the pilot scheme.

Mr. Forth: I can do that for the hon. Gentleman now. In the normal way, the Employment Service and officials from my Department came to me with a number of different options. These were discussed and considered, and they included a number of different areas, including Maidstone. With advice from my officials, I decided on what I thought would be two reasonably representative areas to give us usable results for the pilot project.

The hon. Gentleman should not read conspiracies in everything. There was a perfectly straightforward process, and it illustrates the harmonious relationship among Ministers, officials and the Employment Service, which I am confident will continue.

Mr. McCartney: That was an interesting and revealing answer. I offer no conspiracy theory—I just asked a clear question. It was interesting to note that the Minister referred to the "harmonious relationship" between Ministers. [HON. MEMBERS: "And officials."] Fair enough. I apologise to the officials, who are neither seen nor heard in this place. But his answer seems to indicate that there was at least some discussion between the Minister and his hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone about the matter. Is that the case? Were any representations made to the Minister on the placement of the pilot scheme?

Mr. Forth *rose—*

Mr. Blunkett: The Minister must be careful what he says.

Mr. Forth: I shall be very careful, and I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's advice.

I had no discussions with any colleague, other than the Secretary of State—I hope that the hon. Gentleman accepts that that was correct—about the decision, which was mine to make. I gave advice to the Secretary of State, and she was content with the advice I gave. I had no discussions with other colleagues, parliamentary or ministerial.

Mr. McCartney: I accept in good faith what the Minister said. [HON. MEMBERS: "So apologise."] I will

[Mr. McCartney]

apologise for nothing. I raised a pertinent point, which the Minister has clarified to my satisfaction. Let us hope that the matter will rest there. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] But we must wait and see. There are enough lawyers in this place to make mischief on almost any issue. I am not one of them. I am not a lawyer, but mischief-making is another matter.

It is important that, if the regulations are passed in their present form, when hon. Members seek, either collectively or individually, to discuss their implications with Ministers, there is an open-door policy. The regulations are complex. There is insufficient time today to cover all the issues which arise from the regulations, but I have tried to express—I hope without boring the House unduly—how seriously we take their implications. We need some assurances and some clarification of the regulations from the Minister, which I hope he will provide in his reply.

We reject the JSA and all it stands for. The only vote that will count, however, will be at the next election, when we will get rid of not only the JSA but this Government. We will then introduce employment policies to benefit the whole nation.

4.55 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): The speech—

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): Some sense at last.

Mr. Hughes: My hon. Friend might want to make that judgment after I sit down.

The speech by the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) was very revealing, and I hope that those who look after such things will ensure that Conservative central office has it duplicated and sent out to business men.

Mr. Duncan: We will.

Mr. Hughes: While the hon. Gentleman's leader goes around making speeches about a conservative economy and taking tough decisions, and even mentions workfare and the need to crack down on people who do not deserve to receive benefit, not one bit of that has washed through to any of his colleagues, including his spokesmen. It is clear that old Labour, which is real Labour, is alive and well and living in the whole of its policies.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): We can hear it.

Mr. Hughes: Not only can we hear it, it is clear that the country will hear it as time goes on. The speech of the hon. Member for Makerfield was grossly old-fashioned and demonstrated a lack of understanding that the only people in the world who do not believe in a conservative economy are those in the British Labour party.

Is it not curious that the Labour party leader must go around pretending to believe in a conservative economy? Perhaps he does, but his party plainly does not. I shall provide a brief tutorial for the Labour party, before I turn to the regulations. Unemployment does not cause excess Government spending, as the hon. Member for Makerfield suggested. Excess Government spending causes unemployment. If he understood that, he would understand a great deal more.

Ms Eagle: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, after significant and hard cuts in public expenditure in the Budget, only £3 billion was saved for tax cuts? Year on year, however, we are spending at least £20 billion, and possibly as much as £22 billion, to support the mass unemployment that has persisted for the entire life of this Government.

Mr. Hughes: I have no doubt that the figures given by the hon. Lady are correct. There were not cuts in public expenditure; the rate of growth was reduced, which is a significant difference.

Mr. Duncan: Let us be intellectually honest.

Mr. Hughes: As my hon. Friend says, it is intellectually honest, but that is not something that one would expect from the Labour party. What the hon. Lady has said shows that she does not understand new Labour either. Perhaps there is someone on the other side who does understand new Labour and who will explain it to us. It is a bit rich for the hon. Member for Makerfield to say that the regulations are being forced through in three hours, because a proper piece of primary legislation has been put before the House. I have no doubt that Ministers, Back Benchers and Opposition spokesmen spent many hours in Committee discussing the regulations.

Ms Eagle: The problem is that the regulations had not even been drafted when the Jobseekers Bill was in Standing Committee. This is, in effect, the first sight that we have had of them, yet they form much of the detail of that Act. That is one of the objections we had to the shape and status of the Act as it went through the primary legislation stage.

Mr. Hughes: If we reach the dark days of a brief sojourn under a Labour Government, we will remember those words about every detail being on the face of every Bill which that Government might bring forward. However, I believe that we are unlikely to have a Labour Government.

Undoubtedly, there is much confusion among people who administer the system and, most important, among the people who receive the benefits. There is confusion between unemployment benefit and income support. Therefore, it is important that we should replace that confusing and out-of-date two-benefit system. Those two benefits cover different periods and play different roles. They require different bureaucracies, offices and computer systems, so it is not surprising that people are confused about it. The system is probably too complex for staff to administer, and it is bound to be more expensive for the taxpayer. Therefore, I welcome the principle behind the Bill.

I also welcome another element of the regulations, which I might describe as the carrot. That element is the way in which the new jobseeker's allowance will encourage people back into work. We all understand, from different perspectives, that the longer people remain on benefit, the more their motivation and skills decline, thus reducing their chances of finding a job.

I welcome the fact that the new system will attempt to keep people in touch with the labour market by encouraging them to take part-time work, and will help

people to move from part-time to full-time employment. It will also allow others to take unfamiliar work without being unfairly penalised if the jobs do not work out.

The back-to-work bonus enshrined in the legislation is very inventive. At present, after a small initial level of earnings—£5 per person or £10 per couple a week—income support is reduced pound for pound, which discourages part-time work by claimants and partners. Under the new back-to-work bonus, the Government will set aside 50p of every £1 by which benefit is reduced when claimants enter part-time work to pay to them, up to a maximum of £1,000, when they enter full-time employment. That will have a genuine effect of increasing the incentive to begin work again. It will certainly reward honesty and encourage part-time work as a stepping stone to employment, while retaining the essential difference between a benefit that is paid to people out of work and one that is paid to people who are in full-time employment.

I also welcome another aspect of the regulations which could be called the stick—the regulations take the carrot and stick approach. I have a genuine criticism of what the hon. Member for Makerfield said in his speech, because the Labour party is good at talking about incentives, carrots, and not very good at contemplating the idea that one has to be tough sometimes and make people seek work, sticks. I welcome the sanctions on people who are simply working the system—those whom one might call the workshy—although everyone in the House, especially Conservative Members, recognises that most claimants make every effort to find work and that the jobseeker's allowance will assist them.

Taxpayers are rarely mentioned in the equation, but they have rights as well. They have the right to be protected against those who are not genuinely available for and looking for work. The discussion that my hon. Friend the Minister had earlier with my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) is very important. Of course, claimants' politics and the fact of taking part in political activity are no bar to their getting employment and should not be any bar to benefit. Nor will they be, but if people set themselves up as full-time political activists and deliberately make themselves unavailable for work, why should the taxpayers, who are suffering from those activities, pay the bill?

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend was present when I asked the Minister how one could prove whether people were available for work. There is a simple way, because if we had a full system of workfare, which I would fully support, people would either work in return for their benefits or have an ordinary job. *[Interruption.]* There would be no doubt about whether they were engaging in full-time political activity.

Mr. Hughes: That is certainly one of the merits of such a scheme. The reception given to what my hon. Friend has just said by Opposition Members is interesting. He was heckled when he suggested workfare. I thought that the Leader of the Opposition had recently floated that idea. Opposition Members must decide whether they are on the side of their leader or whether they will toddle off to join Arthur Scargill, where their hearts really are.

Under the existing scheme, in order to receive the jobseeker's allowance, unemployed people will have to be available for and actually seek work. The tests will be extended to ensure that people who take steps that deliberately undermine their prospects of finding work will be penalised. We have read enough in the papers about Government officials paying benefits to people living in tree-tops, as my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster put it. Those officials can continue making those visits, but with a different purpose. We can find out who is demonstrating and whether the taxpayer is having to support them.

Mr. Purchase: And penalise them when the officials catch up with them.

Mr. Hughes: No, I wish to penalise them only if they are not available for work. If the hon. Gentleman does not support that, that is an interesting commentary on how much he supports the leader of the Labour party.

People must be available for work for a minimum of 40 hours. That will reinforce the message that people should be prepared to be open to as many job opportunities as possible and should be prepared to work full time for a full-time benefit. In other words, if people are prepared to take full-time benefits, they should be available full time to seek work. The existing official recommendation whereby Employment Service staff can instruct people to take certain steps to find a job will be widened under the new jobseeker's direction, and I welcome that. If unemployed people refuse all the help that is offered to them, it is right that the trained advisers should be able to require them to take opportunities for improving their prospects of finding a job.

I am sure that my hon. Friends and anybody else listening to the debate will have been deeply unimpressed by the way the hon. Member for Makerfield failed so dismally to welcome today's unemployment figures. Of course, any unemployment figure is too high if it means that people are actively seeking work but cannot find it. Nobody welcomes that, but the hon. Gentleman was so churlish that he did not welcome the reduction in unemployment.

Mr. Ian McCartney: Will the hon. Gentleman give his view, as a London Member of Parliament, on why there are 20 unemployed people in London for every one vacancy, even after today's figures? When will he start advocating for those people instead of being a sycophant to the Government?

Mr. Hughes: I gave my views on that at the beginning of my speech. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman does not understand the economics involved. No one welcomes unemployment; it is important to reduce it. But it is wrong to believe that we can buy our way out of unemployment—although that is Labour policy. The Labour party wants a tax on windfall earnings; Opposition Members believe, farcically, that that will do the trick. The Labour party has already tried to spend the money 11 times over and doubtless will come up with other ideas for spending it again. That is not a formula for improving the job prospects of anyone's constituents.

Unemployment has been falling and is lower here than in most of our European partners' countries. The European unemployment average is 10.5 per cent. of the population of working age. In this country, unemployment averages 8.2 per cent.; in Germany, it averages 8.4 per cent.; in France, 11.4 per cent.; and in Italy, 11.3 per cent. Of course it is important to give young people the best

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possible training opportunities to enable them to find jobs. In socialist Spain, youth unemployment is 40.3 per cent.; in the United Kingdom, it is 17.2 per cent.—quite a difference. Suggesting that those differences have nothing to do with the policies followed by the Governments concerned is ludicrous.

Mr. David Shaw: Will my hon. Friend comment on the fact that we have heard nothing from the Opposition on whether the stakeholder economy will increase or reduce unemployment? Why cannot the Opposition tell us whether it will reduce unemployment by 500,000, or a million, or any other number? Is it because "the stakeholder economy" is an empty and meaningless phrase uttered by the Leader of the Opposition?

Mr. Hughes: As a vegetarian, I find the idea of the stakeholding society offensive—but my hon. Friend has hit the nail on the head. It is designed as an empty and meaningless phrase, among many other such phrases. The leader of the Labour party, interviewed on the television on Sunday, seemed to think—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Before the hon. Gentleman continues, may I inquire how this relates to the regulations under consideration?

Mr. Hughes: The number of people seeking jobs, Madam Deputy Speaker, is directly affected by the handling of the economy—but I agree that I have gone a long way down this road. I had intended to finish soon, but I was being egged on by my hon. Friends who, as ever, have been a bad influence on me.

We are told that the Labour party has embarked on a project to "think the unthinkable" on social security. The party has proved by its attitude to this subject that it has not yet got as far as the first word of that phrase. If Opposition Members started to think, they might come up with good ideas. So far, they have not even begun.

5.12 pm

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North-East): I speak in today's debate because of the bad news given to me about the employment figures in my constituency. I welcome the fact that unemployment generally is falling, but I regret that today's figures show that it has risen in my area. That is because of redundancy problems; most recently, 520 people lost their jobs at a local steelworks. Most of them will not register in the figures until January, however. On top of that, there will be another 100 redundancies in a local foundry unless a buyer for it can be found.

Like many hon. Members, I take a keen interest in the jobseeker's allowance. I have read the regulations, and I am interested in how they are supposed to work. I am forced to the conclusion that they will not significantly help to bring people back into work. The main way to increase the number of jobs in an economy is to increase demand. In this and many other countries, however, the right sort of demand has been absent. Increasing consumer demand has not led to increased demand for British goods; it has merely sucked in imports throughout the economic cycle. According to the most recent trade balance figures, manufactured imports are running four percentage points ahead of exports. That represents a crisis for the British economy in what must be the longest recession, properly defined, since the war.

Even if these regulations were brilliantly thought out, novel and expeditious in their application, they would not significantly help people back to work. The Government must take responsibility for the debilitation of thousands of people, young and old, who have become disenchanted and lost all understanding of the world of work. People's understanding of the society in which they live may be summarised by the three Ws: work, wealth and welfare. We have to work hard to create the wealth that we can then distribute in the form of welfare. There is no purpose in going to work apart from improving the condition of all the people of this country through the distribution of welfare, in the widest sense of that word.

The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) talked about the earnings from windfall profits. That was a contradiction in terms. If they are a windfall, they have come, by definition, accidentally or fortuitously. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] That is how your Government defined the word when they decided to tax the windfall profits of the banks. I am doing no more than your Government did at the time—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that he should be addressing me.

Mr. Purchase: I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): The hon. Gentleman is banging on with commendable compassion about unemployed people. He seems to want to do more for the unemployed, but if a Labour Government were returned to power they would introduce a minimum wage which, it has been said, would make 1.7 million more people unemployed, because of differentials erosion and because employers would not be able to afford to employ them. How would the hon. Gentleman explain that to his constituents?

Mr. Purchase: I shall deal with that directly in a moment, but I want to make some progress with my speech.

The Government have succeeded in breaking the link, especially for young people, between work and welfare. It is worth considering how many young people understand where wealth and welfare come from. Many of them see wealth and welfare as a girocheque dropping through the door on to the mat. They are disconnected from the process of work and wealth creation, and that is wholly due to the policies of this Government. Trying to mend the failure by these regulations—they did not appear in the Bill; Ministers claim that their details could not have appeared in the Bill—is disgraceful.

The Minister claims that the regulations have been forced on him because of printing errors, at least in respect of the arithmetical formula used. One wonders whether he should have got out of bed this morning. It is farcical to introduce regulations and Bills that are incomplete. It is not fair to the people who are forced for the foreseeable future to depend on benefits.

We know the purpose behind the Government's welfare regulations. They are not about targeting; one could make a respectable case for targeting limited resources. The whole purpose is to save money. That is what they will be doing and that is their intention with this new set of regulations.

As we all know, the social security and unemployment regulations are already so complex that there is considerable and continuing underclaiming. With the type of formula being brought before us today, the people who have to administer the system will not properly understand what people are entitled to. They simply cannot unravel the regulations to ensure that people are cared for properly by the unemployment benefit offices.

Unemployment has increased massively. There are a million fewer jobs than when the Conservatives came to power. What has been made up in part-time jobs in no way compensates for the loss of full-time jobs, particularly in west midlands constituencies such as mine, where there has been a proud history of innovation, scientific endeavour and engineering and technology to create the wealth from which we have all benefited for so many years. This country has been losing jobs in manufacturing industry year on year—200,000 every year. How do we count that unemployment?

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): The hon. Gentleman lists a catalogue of gloom and doom about the employment statistics. I have the figures for his constituency here. In December 1994 there were 4,914 unemployed, whereas in December 1995 there were 4,433. That represents a drop of almost 10 per cent. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will welcome that.

Mr. Purchase: I was moving on to that very point. It is an excellent illustration of the way in which the Government have tried to fiddle the unemployment figures.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: It cannot be a fiddle. Those are the figures.

Mr. Purchase: I am telling the hon. Gentleman that it is a fiddle and a farce. I shall give the real figures for my constituency. My figures were compiled by the economic development unit of the local authority, which takes them from proper census information rather than from the imagined benefit claimants on which the Government's figures are based.

Another 149 people have been claiming benefit in my constituency—149 additional people on top of the total of almost 4,000 men and women claiming benefit. I shall give the House some of the ward figures, which are accurate because they are based on proper, up-to-date information about people who are of economically active age, but who are not in work. In the Heath Town ward, 25 per cent. of all men are unemployed. In the Low Hill ward, 25 per cent. are unemployed. Those are the real figures.

However one tries to disguise the fact, the evidence of people's eyes and their experience shows that they are unemployed now, they were unemployed 12 months ago and, sadly, in 40 per cent. of cases they have been unemployed for much longer than 12 months. That is the sort of problem that we have to face.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): Is there not one loophole that states that anyone over the age of 50 who has not been gainfully employed for 10 years does not come under the rules? Surely that will help the Conservatives. After the next election, half their Members will not come under the criteria. They will still be able to claim.

Mr. Purchase: My hon. Friend is right. That helps the Conservatives. It is appalling for my constituents and for everyone else's, but that is not part of the equation that they bring before us today, or any other day.

Let us move on and find out how else the Government have made the position so much worse and how much more they are spending on benefits and unemployment pay.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt, but we are dealing with the regulations that relate to the jobseeker's allowance. Although it is in order to adduce various examples, I hope that this will not become a general debate on unemployment, because that is not the purpose of this afternoon's debate.

Mr. Purchase: I take your guidance on that matter, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am trying to show that the regulations will not assist in the way in which the Government say they will, because the problems lie deeper and, to some extent, are buried elsewhere. The regulations simply do not tackle the matters that the Government claim they are tackling. They will not assist my constituents and many others back into work, which is the express purpose of the regulations.

The question is: how much money is having to be spent and how could it be reduced without attacking people's benefit? The drive towards market rents in the local authority and housing association sectors means that rents have doubled and trebled. People are forced to stay unemployed because, if they work for the very low wages that some people are earning, they will not be able to meet any of the costs that they normally can because their benefits will be withdrawn. They will be in what we used to call, and still call, the poverty trap, because they will not get back into work, and they will not be assisted by the regulations.

I know that other hon. Members want to speak, but I want briefly to mention the way in which the Government deal with the problems. Boardroom scams in the privatised industries have been mentioned. This may be an old-fashioned, old-Labour way to put it, but I am proud to be associated in that sense with the sentiments that I am about to express. When a chief executive of a nationalised industry is given £250,000 in bonuses—earned or unearned—it is called market forces, and it is because we need to attract the right calibre of people into those jobs. They do not need a jobseeker's allowance—it is not on the cards. But when the labourer asks for an extra 2 per cent., it is a scandal and the ruination of the economy.

The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) mentioned the minimum wage. He is not correct in saying that it would lead to X million job losses. That is not the evidence, which is that, in the short and medium term, employment would increase. The evidence shows that demand would increase within the economy and that, because that increase would be from those on the lowest incomes, home-manufactured goods would be purchased in the shops and in the high street, which would assist in getting people back into employment. That will happen when the labour market gets back into balance and people can properly demand a reasonable day's pay for a reasonable day's work.

Mr. Forth: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Earlier in the debate, I drew the attention of the House to the report of the Joint Committee on Statutory

[Mr. Forth]

Instruments of yesterday's date, which pointed out printing errors in the regulations as laid before the House. Perhaps I made slightly heavy weather of dealing with the matter, but I did so in a spirit of openness, as I hope the House will accept. Labour Members expressed some concerns about the approach that I suggested. I have since had the benefit of conversations with Opposition Members, the authorities of the House and even more mysterious figures whom I dare not even mention because their anonymity is total. All the advice is that, since it is a printer's error and the Joint Committee's report makes that clear, it will be in order for that error to be corrected. If the House approves the regulations at the end of the debate, it can be corrected. That would be proper and that would be accepted. I hope that Opposition Members can accept that. I have raised the matter in good faith and that was the advice that I received. I hope that the House will be prepared to accept that that is how we should proceed in this important area.

Mr. Ian McCartney: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I can confirm that the hon. Gentleman has had discussions with me and with what he claims to be other mysterious persons on the Opposition Front Bench. We have accepted his explanation in good faith. We have checked all his pockets, his wallet and other parts of his anatomy to ensure that he is not sneaking anything else through. On the basis that we could find nothing, we have accepted that this is simply another Government error—another bungle.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. That seems to deal with the matter satisfactorily. I call the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan).

5.28 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): The rather large batch of regulations that we are debating today has the merit of fitting coherently into the Government's intellectual path in their reform of social security. Nothing points out more clearly the benefits of the Government's wider economic policy and the detail of the regulations under discussion than the fact that unemployment figures have fallen for the 28th month in succession. That is important to every individual who manages to get a job, although, sadly, the Opposition have acknowledged it so begrudgingly. The Government's economic policy is working, and the regulations that we are studying today will help that policy work further to the advantage of individuals to whom getting a job actually matters.

Ms Eagle: I thank the hon. Gentleman, to whom I always listen with interest. Does he realise that the regulations are not yet in force, therefore, by definition, they cannot possibly be working.

Mr. Duncan: Had she listened carefully, the hon. Lady would realise that I described the regulations as an extension of an economic and social security policy that is already in practice. It operates under the watchful eye of the Secretary of State, whose reforms have been to the advantage of the economy generally and the many individuals who have secured a job and have concentrated benefit on those who are most in need. It sits in stark contrast to the intellectual dishonesty of the Opposition that has been in clear evidence today.

The Opposition say that the Government are financing mass unemployment. That slogan is designed to deceive. It is a concoction of two economically illiterate concepts in an attempt to convince the public that Opposition policies would somehow deliver more employment. Regulations that properly assess how the labour market and the housing market work will deliver the progress that we seek.

When the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) accuses us of financing mass unemployment, is he saying that he would reduce what I loosely call unemployment benefit? Is he saying that he would stop paying those who are unemployed and compel them to take jobs and that if Labour were in government resources would be diverted into forcing people to accept work in sectors for which they are not appropriately trained? That is economic nonsense. The hon. Gentleman and his colleagues know that it is a deceit. They should go back to the drawing board and devise policies that are intellectually more honest.

The reforms are good because they have been thought through in considerable detail, which is here for us all to see in rather too many pages of regulations. None the less, the regulations are designed to work.

The House will recall that I spoke in the debate on Second Reading of the Bill that produced the regulations. The jobseeker's allowance has much merit in simplifying the benefit system and combining unemployment benefit and income support into a single benefit. I regret that Opposition Members have not welcomed the simplification of a system that has caused many distortions in the past. The reform is designed to address the distortions and remove the traps and disincentives that many people have faced in the past.

The regulations improve incentives to work. Perhaps I find a common cause with the hon. Member for Makerfield in seeking regulations that do not give individuals an undue incentive to remain out of work and on benefit. He and I agree on that, and it is the purpose of the regulations, yet he does not give them the welcome that they deserve.

Mr. Ian McCartney: Has the hon. Gentleman read them?

Mr. Duncan: I am asked whether I have read them and the answer is yes. There are 200 pages of regulations and I have taken the time to read them all. They did not make the most exciting reading, and are slightly more expensive than Mogadon, but I have gone through every page. I even read the printing error. The Opposition made heavy weather of the printing error, but the format of the equation is obvious further down the page. I am glad that the Minister and the Opposition spokesman have reconciled their differences and reached an accommodation to allow the regulations to continue.

I am concerned that the regulations are so extensive. I have an innate objection to regulations and, wherever possible, would like fewer, simpler, easier and less complicated ones. I rather feel for the employee at the Benefits Agency who has to administer this rather complicated, long and extensive series of documents—the regulations that we are debating today.

There is much to grasp and many rules over which there is bound to be dispute. When regulations are so complicated and designed by the best brains in the civil

service in an attempt to cover every eventuality, there are bound to be problems. However, they are worth swallowing—albeit they are a lot to swallow—to deliver the benefits that Government policy rightly considers will work to the advantage of those who are unemployed and seeking a job or income support.

Although Conservatives take the view that Government involvement in such matters should be as limited as possible, the Opposition do not appear to share the same restraint. Opposition Members should realise that were regulation—in this case, properly designed for a good cause, so I welcome it—applied to other areas of Government and policy, it would produce a bureaucratic nightmare. It is in the nature of the beast that state involvement will produce just that, and the less of it we have, the better.

I confess that I would like the language and the drafting of the regulations to be much plainer and simpler. The House should address with a great measure of concern and concentration the fact that the convoluted language that bedevils so much of our legislation is translated into practice not by lawyers, but by people making decisions about delivering benefits to people in genuine need. Inasmuch as the regulations have been drafted with that in mind, those who produced them have done a good job, but we must be watchful in trying to work out the detail. The devil is in the detail and regulations should be as simple and practical as possible.

The regulations are an improvement on what went before. I found, from my heavy reading of them and my study of the Act on which I spoke, that they remove some of the distortions that have crept into the labour market and the housing market to the disadvantage of those who genuinely seek work and to the advantage of those who wish to make the most of the regulations and claim money from the state in return for no work at all.

Whenever the state becomes involved, the labour market faces certain distortions. We judge that the distortions that are caused by paying unemployed people are worth while in order to alleviate the pain of unemployment, but we have to beware of further distorting the labour market. The combination of benefits in the regulations draws together the incentives and disincentives in a far more practical way, to the advantage of a freely working labour market.

I draw attention to the regulators relating to housing costs, which does the same in the housing market. Contrary to what the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase) said about the grave distortions introduced in the housing market by the housing benefits system, the way in which the regulators will apply to younger people represents an improvement. Otherwise, there is an incentive—that also applies to regional variations—for people to take the most and for rents to rise to the level of the benefit available, which ultimately does no one any good.

One effect of any package of such regulations is that people learn how to use them. Regulations are constructed on the assumption that people will behave decently and claim only when they genuinely need to do so. Nevertheless, when state money is available, some people will realise that there is a way of getting some of that money and will use regulations and the system to get money for nothing if they can. The detail in the regulations is effectively designed to ensure that risk is minimised. I commend that approach because whereas the Department of Social Security properly wants to attack fraud, it has been cleverer of late in designing regulations that can be practically applied, to ensure that a system designed to help people in need cannot be abused.

After 28 months of successive falls in unemployment, the House should pause for a moment to consider what would happen if these regulations were being introduced in a different climate and under a different Government. Contrary to Labour's claims, if its policies of a social chapter, minimum wage and so-called stakeholding were implemented—under which trade unions would be back in control and demanding so much from the Government in return for power—the total number of unemployed would be far higher than today and the figure would be rising, not falling. Labour has had great fun over the past couple of years in trying to convince the electorate that it would deliver an economic miracle. The public are gradually waking up to the deceit contained in many of Labour's slogans and so-called policies. Economic reality is dawning again, and the public realise that our policies will deliver the prosperity that this country is increasingly enjoying.

5.41 pm

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): I will concentrate mainly on the jobseeker's regulations because they are the most controversial, but I will speak briefly to other regulations as well.

The Employer's Contributions Re-imbursement Regulations are welcome but are likely to get an insufficient number of long-term unemployed back to work. Unfortunately, most long-term unemployed are perceived by employers to be a liability. I doubt that the average of £375 per employer will encourage many employers to take on that many unemployed. A proper benefit transfer scheme is needed, which would get the long-term unemployed back into work.

The Housing Benefit, Supply of Information and Council Tax Benefit (Amendment) Regulations are also welcome. They recognise the difficulties that confront unemployed people when they take a job, such as the extra money needed to travel to and from work and other difficulties experienced in the first few weeks of employment. The Social Security (Back to Work Bonus) Regulations are welcome but do not go far enough, and how they work in practice remains to be seen. I imagine that they could create an administrative nightmare, and we will have to monitor those regulations carefully.

The most complimentary remark that I can make about the Jobseeker's Allowance Regulations is that the Government had the good sense to delay implementing some aspects of them until October—those relating to the computer system and staff training in particular. Anyone who followed the fiasco of establishing the Child Support Agency's computer system can only welcome that decision. I hope that the computer system will be got right in this case. Otherwise, the jobseeker's allowance will risk being in the same mess as was caused by the implementation of the Child Support Act 1991.

The Government are not delaying the majority of the jobseeker's allowance provisions—such as the non-means-tested reduction in payment from 12 months to six months, which will go ahead in April. Partners of unemployed people, usually women, will be encouraged

[Ms Liz Lynne]

to leave part-time employment even sooner, to ensure that their husbands or wives have entitlement to benefit. Even more important is their entitlement to passported benefits. Many people entering employment discover, having lost passported benefits, that they were better off out of work.

At the heart of the regulations is the desire to coerce people back to work. Since 1986 the Government have introduced stricter tests and more benefit sanctions. In 1986, the sanction for leaving a job or being dismissed for misconduct was increased in terms of non-payment of benefit from six to 13 weeks, and doubled in 1988 to 26 weeks. Stricter measures affecting availability for work were introduced, and now the Government have introduced the jobseeker's allowance. We have seen one stricter regulation after another.

The regulations will make all Government employment and training schemes compulsory. Regulation 25 states that entitlement to the jobseeker's allowance will cease if the person fails to attend a training programme. Is that power really necessary? Are not the Government just conceding that many training schemes offer little hope of employment after completion? I would like an answer from the Minister when he winds up. Instead of coercion, surely the answer is better training and better employment schemes that people want to join.

Some of the conditions imposed on people actively seeking work relate to their appearance. Again, I would like the Minister's clarification. Will a young man with a ponytail have to cut it off? Will a young woman have to wear make-up, a shorter skirt or a longer skirt? Who will decide—the interviewer? Will guidance be issued? Will the interviewer have to provide the jobseeker with specific guidance on his or her appearance for a particular job?

Ms Eagle: Has the hon. Lady noticed that regulation 18(4), to which she refers, introduces a new criterion for disallowing benefit—that of an inability to fill in the application form properly? Is not that worrying, particularly when there is the problem at the lower end of the labour market of people being unable to read or write properly?

Ms Lynne: I totally agree and share the hon. Lady's deep concern. People who are now denied incapacity or invalidity benefit and who go to a jobcentre to sign on for the jobseeker's allowance may encounter extreme difficulty in completing the necessary form.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Roger Evans): Perhaps I may end that controversy by directing the hon. Lady to regulation 18(4)(b). The act that causes disallowance to be triggered is spoiling the application—not something due to disability, but a deliberate act for the purpose, of not getting a job. We are not talking about people who are unable to complete the form or who have difficulties with it.

Ms Lynne: I am grateful to the Minister, but is there a reference to "deliberately" spoiling? I believe that there is not. Unless there is such a reference, the provision could be interpreted to apply to anyone who is unable properly to complete the application form. If the Minister intended the provision to mean deliberately spoiling the application form, surely he should have made that clear. He did not.

Mr. Evans: I did not read the whole of the relevant provision to the hon. Lady. If she reads the concluding words, she will find the clear proviso:

"unless those circumstances were due to reasons beyond his control."

In other words, spoiling must be intentional. It cannot arise "due to reasons beyond" someone's "control", such as inability to write.

Ms Lynne: I do not want to delay the House because I know that many hon. Members wish to speak. I do not think that the provision to which the Minister has referred gives a guarantee. I would like to see "deliberately" inserted. I shall move on because time is short.

One of my most serious concerns is that the regulations will force claimants into taking low-paid work. Claimants will not be able to say that they will work for a certain wage. They will be debarred from taking that approach even if the wage on offer is inappropriate to their skills and financial circumstances.

The idea of a public employment service matching individuals to appropriate vacancies has now been abandoned. We are seeing an attempt to drive more people into low-paid employment.

It is right, of course, that some people should take work with lower wages than those that they were receiving before becoming unemployed.

Mr. Duncan: I am.

Ms Lynne: Of course some people should do that.

I am concerned that individuals will not be able to opt out. That is entirely wrong. We know that individuals could give specific reasons for being unable to take a job at a certain wage level.

The regulations will encourage more employers to pay low wages. They know that the unemployed person will be forced to take their jobs whatever the wage. With the abolition of the wages councils, the position is even more serious.

Conservative Members have been talking about the taxpayer. The consequence of the regulations is that the taxpayer will be asked to subsidise the low-paying employer. That cannot be right. The JSA will increase employees' financial hardship. What they need is encouragement, training and proper job opportunities. They do not need further coercion and benefit sanctions.

5.52 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): I am glad to have the opportunity to speak briefly on the regulations, especially on the Jobseeker's Allowance Regulations 1996. I was delighted to hear the speeches of the hon. Members for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) and for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase). They prove that the old Labour party is still alive, kicking and well. Employers throughout the country should be wary of the prospect of a future Labour Government when a social security spokesman makes a speech of that sort.

There is a fundamental difference of philosophy between the two sides of the House. We believe that the social security system should provide for those in need. But those in need, and genuinely claiming it, need to help themselves, so that they can organise their affairs and do

not claim benefit indefinitely. The Labour party is content for the present system to remain in place so that claimants can remain on benefits for as long as they want, or for the rest of their lives.

Under the present system, a millionaire can claim unemployment benefit for up to a year without being means-tested. That is daft. I recently participated in an audience-contribution television programme. The spokesman who appeared on behalf of the Labour party defended her party's wish—this was her interpretation of it—to have universal benefits available for all. Half the audience was unemployed and the other half consisted of floating voters. When I said, "It is you people who deserve benefit if you are eligible for it, not every millionaire in the country," they fully agreed with me.

I think that the country will agree with that approach. We should target the huge amount of benefit we pay to those who genuinely need it, not to millionaires. It is—*[Laughter.]* Labour Members laugh, but the country will make a judgment in due course. If Labour Members oppose the regulations, they must tell us how they will find the extra £4 billion to pay for the present system. Implementation of the regulations will save £4 billion. If Labour Members do not like them, what will they put in their place?

According to the Red Book, we shall spend £98 billion on the social security system this year. It so happens that income tax raises £68 billion and corporation tax £20 billion. The two taxes raise about the sum that we spend on social security. Without the present system, we would not need income tax or corporation tax. That demonstrates the scale of our expenditure on social security.

We are not advocating, of course, the abolition of the social security system, but we want to ensure that what we spend on it is directed to those who really need it. Surely—*[Laughter.]* Again, I do not know why Opposition Members laugh. The regulations make eminently good sense.

We are channelling two benefits into one. In other words, we are simplifying the system. The process will be of benefit to claimants, because they will have to complete only one form and go to only one office to obtain their benefit. The regulations will simplify and reduce the cost of administering the system. That is also important. We shall need to have only one office, as it were, one set of regulations and one set of annual upratings under the new system. That must make sense.

Conservative Members are all keen on reducing social security fraud. If we simplify a system, we are bound to reduce fraud. I believe that I have common cause with the hon. Member for Makerfield and others, because I accept that the vast majority of our people want to work. Unfortunately, a few are prepared to work the system. That being so, we must do all we can to ensure that the system cannot be defrauded.

It must be right that those who are unemployed for more than 12 months must be made to go on one of the myriad of schemes that are set out in the regulations. Indeed, the regulations propose an element of coercion to embark on such schemes. It cannot be in the taxpayers' interests or those of claimants that they, claimants, should be able to sit at home, go to the office once a week to draw money and have to do nothing else for the rest of their lives. That culture is not in the interests of the country or of claimants.

I welcome the raft of extremely sensible schemes set out in the regulations. I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends carefully to examine the Labour party's proposed windfall tax and the changes that it presages in introducing a workfare system. I have worked closely with my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Sir R. Howell), and I know that the idea of a community job creation programme is not a new one, although the Labour party claims it as its own. He produced two papers in the early 1980s, called "Why Work?" and "Why Not Work?", long before the Labour party had even begun to think about the subject.

I would like to see a more general element introduced into the community workfare scheme. Two such schemes have been introduced in north Norfolk, but at large cost, because they are trial schemes. I believe that, through the private sector, we could introduce a workfare scheme that would benefit both the unemployed and the country. We would all be a lot better off morally and spiritually, if not economically, because such a scheme is not cheap, as the Labour party has proved by its windfall tax.

The problem with a windfall tax, as has already been proved this evening, is that one can use it only once. The Labour party has so far pledged to use it about 11 times. I do not know how many more times it will pledge to use it before the election. It is also completely economically illiterate, because one cannot spend the money twice. If one takes the money away from the companies, the utilities that the Labour party proposes to tax—I am straying from the subject, Madam Deputy Speaker, while you are not listening—they will not be able to reinvest in the infrastructure, and then it will complain about leaks next week.

I come back now to the regulations, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not before time.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I take note of your strictures, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I now come to housing benefit regulation 5. Housing benefit is one of our single most costly benefits. It will cost us a huge £12.5 billion this year, and that figure is rising rapidly. Until we recently introduced the housing benefit reduction scheme, there was no incentive whatever for local authorities, which have to administer that costly scheme, to investigate the claims to see whether they were genuine or not. The scheme that I have just described will encourage local authorities to investigate claims. The regulations before us will further that process.

It is vital that we find a mechanism for people to get off the raft of benefits and back into work. There is no doubt that housing benefit is one of the greatest deterrents for people to go back into work. Under the present regulations, there is a huge, marginal tapering tax rate with which an unemployed person gets clobbered the moment he goes back into work. The thrust of Conservative philosophy is to reduce those rates, so that people have every incentive to take part-time jobs and to work gradually into a full-time job, which is what we all want.

Housing benefit has the additional stigma that it tends

[Mr. Clifton-Brown]

to be concentrated in what are called "housing benefit ghettos". I should like to see that slowly broken down. Our housing policy has a much more imaginative part to play. We can have much more imaginative mixed housing schemes, so that people on housing benefit can start to live among people who are in work and be part of that culture. I believe that the regulations further that aspect, but we should go further still.

Regulation 6 relates to national insurance payments. I warmly welcome the changes that were announced in the Budget, and the national insurance holiday for employers who take on people who have been unemployed for two years or more. Employers will get a national insurance holiday of 12 months.

The hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne), the spokesman for the Liberal Democrats, said that it was a small amount, but I think that some £300 is quite a reasonable incentive for employers to consider taking on the long-term unemployed. I am delighted that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor is about to announce a general reduction in the rate of employers' national insurance, because I believe that the tax is a disincentive for businesses to take on new employees.

I am hopeful that, if—as should happen—we are re-elected after the general election, we will be able radically to cut the amount of national insurance, and, if necessary, put a small amount on corporation tax. That would help this country to become the enterprise centre of Europe that Conservative Members are determined it should be. I am determined that the regulations should enable us to build on the record number of people in this country who are currently employed.

The Labour party derides and opposes the regulations, but there is no disputing the fact that more people in this country are in work today than ever before—almost 26 million people. If it opposes the regulations, it behoves the Labour party to tell the House what it would put in their place, and what economic policy it would follow to ensure that we have the lowest unemployment rate in Europe.

It is no accident that this country has the lowest unemployment rate in Europe, particularly among the young. The young people are the real people of tomorrow. We must ensure that we employ them, and the regulations will build on that. It is no coincidence that the countries that have a minimum wage have the highest rate of youth unemployment. Just look at what the Labour party would put in place of the regulations. It would put in place a minimum wage, which—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is becoming a little excited and is going off the point, so could I bring him back strictly to the regulations?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I hope that I am not getting excited, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am using my normal passion to ensure that the debate on these somewhat humdrum regulations is a little more easy to listen to, and I had hoped that it would encourage other hon. Members to take part.

I wholeheartedly welcome the regulations. It behoves the Labour party, if it opposes them, to tell us what it would put in their place; how much it would spend on the social security system; and how it would run the economy so that more people are employed.

6.5 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I agree that the passion of the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) perhaps unhinged him from the debate on the regulations.

As hon. Members have said, many people, thankfully, are unemployed only for a short period. But others in our constituencies are unemployed for long periods and—although they have been on endless training schemes, the number of which they cannot recall—are still unemployed. To what extent does the bundle of statutory instruments that we are considering today help that group?

We are considering 10,000 lines of regulations in a little over 200 minutes. The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) assures us that he has read them all. We could be forgiven for thinking that the Minister has not, for it was the Joint Committee, not he, that spotted the errors in them.

There is a slight element of farce to the conclusion of our debate—that we have 10,000 lines of regulations to consider in under 200 minutes; and that we were assured that, although there was an error in them, if the Minister read the proper words on to the record, all would be well. He follows a long tradition of Ministers who produce regulations. Most social security legislation is followed by regulations that are amended before the regulations take effect. The Minister, by reading changes on to the record, broke that record.

There is, of course, another important lesson to draw from our debate tonight, as the population is being taught a very important lesson. The regulations tear up a contract that the Government made with those who contribute to the national insurance scheme.

The Government rightly draw attention to the decline in moral standards, the decline in honesty and the decline in the number of people who keep their word. Yet tonight we are debating regulations which teach people that, although they should keep those standards, the Government should behave differently.

The Government do not really understand the power of legislation. We have passed divorce law reform in the House that allows divorces to take place—for a contract to be broken—after only half the length of an average hire purchase agreement. Then the Government turn around and say, "We are immensely worried about the number of divorces." Today, we are passing regulations that teach people that it does not matter whether they keep their word—and the Government will turn around and say, "Isn't it appalling? More people are breaking their word."

We are required to make payments to the national insurance fund, and a contract was laid down in the previous regulations. The Act, and the regulation that has followed it, breaks that contract. We were paying for 12 months of unemployment; now, by edict, the Government are changing the period to six months. That means that all the people who made contributions expecting to draw 12 months' benefit will receive half that amount. The Government have broken their word.

Mr. Forth: In fact, the Act rather than the regulations that followed it changed the position. It is also questionable whether, strictly speaking, this was ever a contract in the normally accepted sense of the word; but I accept the burden of the hon. Gentleman's remarks. He

must surely recognise, however, that nothing in the relationship between Government and people is set in concrete. Circumstances change.

It must be generally accepted in the political environment that Governments are free to make changes from time to time. It is for them to justify those changes, and, indeed, to live with the consequences. It cannot be right to suggest that, once an arrangement is in place, it can never be changed on the basis that it is to the advantage or disadvantage of those involved.

Mr. Field: If this were a private contract, people would be able to enforce their rights in the courts. The courts would say that breaking the contract was improper behaviour. But we have a sovereign body here in the Chamber; the Government control the Chamber, and can therefore break their word. They could have said that all who made contributions expecting to receive 12 months' benefit could continue to draw that amount, whereas those who paid under a different contract from this day forward could receive only six months' benefit; but they have not said that.

The Government are breaking a contract, and breaking their word. That teaches the country a powerful lesson. When we are trying to teach children not to deface areas with graffiti and to keep their word with school, parents and friends, it does not help when the most powerful authority in the land decides to break its word because it is a sovereign body and, unlike any other state authority, can take such action.

Mr. Nigel Evans: I have considerable time and respect for the hon. Gentleman, but surely his argument applies to previous Labour Governments. It was a Labour Government who cut benefit from 18 months' worth to 12.

Mr. Field: They were equally wrong, as would any future Government be who broke a contract.

What we are really debating is whether the national insurance fund is safe in Government's hands. That is why some of us have talked about stakeholding, and believe that those who have made contributions—both employers and employees—need to run the schemes themselves. The Government should not be able to put their sticky fingers into them.

Let me say a little about the word "flexibility". We were given an example of flexibility today: we found that there were errors in the regulations, and that the Minister wanted to read changes on to the record. We understand from certain faceless creatures that that is allowed. In general, we all like flexibility, provided that it does not apply to us. Today we are applying it to the unemployed—but I believe that, in important respects, the Government remain inflexible. Indeed, the regulations suggest that they are becoming less flexible in regard to the needs of the unemployed.

Under existing income support regulations, a couple who have been receiving benefit for more than two years are allowed a £15 disregard; under the regulations, that disregard is cut to £10 for everyone. Those in receipt of the £15 would have thought, "Yes, this is flexibility"—but presumably flexibility in the wrong direction, if the aim is to reintroduce people to the world of work.

Let me give a second example of flexibility working to the claimant's disadvantage. The regulations tighten controls on those who spend their time profitably while they are unemployed by undertaking courses: the 21-hour rule becomes a 16-hour rule. That is another Poor Law, allowing people to claim benefit only if they are doing nothing profitable. It represents flexibility from the Government's point of view, and inflexibility from that of the claimant.

My final example of inflexibility is the worst. Our economy increasingly involves households with no workers, and households with many workers. The benefit system is a major reason for that, and it is reinforced in the regulations. The partner of someone who is unemployed and receiving insurance benefit is free to work: indeed, it pays that person to work. Under existing law, as soon as the 52nd week is reached and the recipient is dragged down to means-tested benefit, it pays almost no partners to continue working; in fact, if they do so, they will be substantially worse off. So what happens? People think economically, and give up their jobs.

The Secretary of State has said that one of the most important reasons for the growing inequality in household incomes is the fact that people have unequal access to the labour market. On the one hand, there are many households without work; on the other hand—thank God—there are many households with many people in work. The regulations are driving an even greater wedge between the two groups.

We are discussing 10,000 lines of regulations, but what we are debating is how those regulations will affect people. The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton was right: most people, thank goodness, move quickly from one job to another. Others, however—because of their lack of skills, and because of their age—find that immensely difficult. All of us represent many people who have found it impossible for decades to secure work.

We no longer collect the information on how long people have been out of work. In a fantastically powerful passage in "Doctor Zhivago", the storyteller condemns the wicked Bolsheviks not just for killing Lara, but for not even keeping a record of where the evil deed took place. We no longer know how many people have been out of work for five, 10, 15 or 20 years.

Aspects of the regulations, the new Act and the training schemes should be supported, but I beg the House not to kid itself that, by limiting ourselves to the present agenda, we shall either solve the problem of unemployment or—much more important—help those who have stood the longest at the end of a very long queue.

6.18 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): It is always a privilege to listen to the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). I know that he is sincere, although obviously I do not agree with all that he says.

I welcome the fall in unemployment about which we have heard today. I consider it good news for those who have been unemployed even for a short time: unemployment is a worry for them if they are not certain of securing employment immediately, although two thirds of those who become unemployed will find jobs within six months. Their circumstances must be stressful for them and their families. Unemployment is an individual tragedy for each unemployed person. I am fortunate because unemployment is low in my constituency, but I am not complacent because, as the hon. Member for

[Mr. Nigel Evans]

Birkenhead said, we are talking about people and about individual tragedies, stress and worry, and that applies even if there is only one unemployed person in a constituency.

As well as this month's drop in unemployment, I welcome the drops that we have had in the past 27 months. I hope that we shall be able to welcome unemployment falls in the months to come. We must make sure that we have policies that allow our businesses, especially the smaller ones which created so many jobs in the 1980s, to be able to create jobs in the 1990s. If each of those businesses took on just one extra person, there would be no unemployment problem.

It is of little consolation to the 8 per cent. of people who are unemployed to hear comparisons with France and Spain where far more people are unemployed. That 8 per cent. of people live in the United Kingdom and they are interested in our policies to try to get them jobs and keep them in employment. The hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) had an opportunity to welcome the drop in unemployment in his constituency. Even over the past 12 months, it has gone down by 7.1 per cent. and, since 1992, it has gone down by 34.8 per cent. I acknowledge that, during the recession, there was a massive increase in unemployment, but we must welcome the current trend. I hope that other hon. Members who speak in the debate will welcome the drop in unemployment in the past few years.

The regulations are complicated and there are many of them, but we have to guarantee that those who implement them have the best available training so that those at the receiving end of the rules and regulations will get a fair deal.

Ms Eagle: The hon. Gentleman demonstrates a commendable worry about the unemployed. Why is he supporting regulations that increase coercive measures and apply them across the board to everybody rather than targeting them at those who are cheating the system? How can he welcome that while at the same time pretending that he is concerned about the unemployed? The regulations attack the unemployed rather than the causes of unemployment.

Mr. Evans: Of course they do not. The hon. Lady had an opportunity to speak about unemployment in her constituency dropping between December 1994 and December 1995 from 5,298 to 4,827 and about a drop of 17.4 per cent. since 1992, but we hear nothing about that.

The regulations help those who are looking for work. The jobseeker's allowance is changing the culture of unemployment. I was on the Standing Committee that examined the legislation and we spent many happy days going through the Bill that led to the Jobseekers Act 1995. I welcome the Act and the fact that we are able to discuss the rules and regulations. Opposition Members had an opportunity to talk about the back-to-work bonus that is paid to people who use the stepping stone from unemployment to part-time employment. Part of the problem faced by those people is the obvious one of losing benefit and income support. It applies pound for pound at an early stage after £10 and a bonus of up to £1,000 will be paid to people who move from benefit to full-time employment. That money will be extremely valuable at the time that they enter full-time work. They get it when they need it most, and that is an imaginative way to help people to escape from the benefit or poverty traps that too many have experienced in the past.

Hon. Members have spoken about people who are workshy. I am the first to admit that there are few such people. The vast majority of people—92 per cent. of the working population—are in work. I recognise that only a small percentage of those who are out of work are not interested in any work whatever. The regulations will help them. We speak about appearance and ask whether the unemployed are putting enough energy into looking for work. That is a proper question because all hon. Members want to ensure that the available money will be targeted at those who need it. Therefore, those who are not serious about seeking work ought to face sanctions, and that is exactly what they will face under the regulations.

Earlier in the debate, we spoke about people who seem to spend 100 per cent. of their time on demonstrations, one of which is being held at the site of the proposed Newbury bypass, where demonstrators are living in trees. The Minister said that such people would face exactly the same rules and regulations and scrutiny as anybody else. I was delighted to hear that, and I hope that those who are enforcing the regulations in Newbury and in other parts of Britain and who witness such demonstrations, where it is obvious that some of the demonstrators have committed 100 per cent. of their time to demonstrations rather than to looking for work, will ensure that they face the full rigour of the regulations. If some of those people spent as much energy looking for work as they spend demonstrating up trees, they would not be in receipt of benefit.

In an intervention during the speech by the hon. Member for Birkenhead, I said that the benefit rules were being simplified by bringing unemployment benefit and income support together and by reducing the time from 12 months to six months. That is the continuation of a policy of a previous Labour Government, and it is right. My hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) spoke about millionaires and those who are extremely wealthy because of a good pay-off from a previous job. Those people would be able to get some of that money for an extra six months, but the Government have a duty to all taxpayers to ensure that money is targeted at those who definitely need it, and a means test after six months is the appropriate way to do that.

The jobseeker's agreement on page 30 of the regulations places a responsibility on those who are seeking work to demonstrate that that is exactly what they are doing. It is useful for people in the Employment Service to be able to see what their clients are doing so that if there are deficiencies, whether in the CVs or the letters that people are sending out, they can be picked up at an early stage and people can be given assistance to look for work. That is an onus on the Government under the contract. The legislation is not a draconian measure saying, "We do not trust the unemployed." It is a way of bringing the Employment Service and its clients together to see how one can help the other.

We have a responsibility to taxpayers because it is their money that is being utilised to pay unemployment benefit. There is a responsibility on those who seek work and a responsibility on the Government. We have heard a good deal about training, but it is pointless to say that we will

cajole people into training that they would prefer not to do while at the same time not providing the schemes that will be absolutely necessary to give such people the opportunities that they seek. A marvellous book called "The UK at Work", which was published by the former Department of Employment, details some of the schemes that are available. Programmes in 1995-96 offered opportunities to almost 1.5 million people. We must ensure that such programmes are available.

If one had to be critical about those programmes, one could say that there are too many of them, and that, perhaps, many people find them too complicated to know what is available; but I welcome the fact that they are available for those who are seeking work.

Mr. Harold Elletson (Blackpool, North): I apologise for not being here for the earlier part of my hon. Friend's speech, but I have greatly enjoyed the remarks that I have heard. Is he aware of the appalling problems faced by tourist resorts, especially in constituencies such as mine? He may have noticed the rapid and incredibly large increases in housing benefit and unemployment benefit in the past five years. Does he share my concern about the way in which tourist resorts continue to be affected by such benefit problems and to be a magnet for people who come to them, often from all over the United Kingdom? They do not genuinely look for work, but are an appalling strain on the tourist industry. Does he not think it time that we dealt with that problem?

Mr. Evans: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend. Obviously, it was his loss that he did not hear the first part of my speech, but he will, no doubt, have the opportunity to read it tomorrow. I know that he is a doughty fighter, not only for people who live in his constituency, but for people who visit it. It is vital that tourist resorts are able to present a picture that will attract tourists and not people who are obviously trying either to avoid work or just to claim benefits. I know that he has been working hard on that matter with a number of other hon. Members who represent seaside resorts.

We have heard so much whining—we are still hearing it and, no doubt, we will continue to hear it before the end of the debate—from the Opposition. The regulations aim to increase opportunities for jobseekers. We hear that the Labour party really cares for unemployed people, but we know that its measures would wreck jobs. We hear about the introduction of the minimum wage and of the social chapter. The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase) disputed that view and said blindly that the minimum wage would create more jobs, but even the deputy leader of his party has said that there would be a massive shake-out if a minimum wage were introduced.

It has been estimated that, if the minimum wage were introduced at £4.50, because of differentials, 1.7 million people would become unemployed. We need an enterprise economy that is backed up by a jobseeker's allowance which will help people into work, not policies that will throw people on to the dole. That is what they would face if the Opposition ever came to power.

6.31 pm

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): We are debating five sets of regulations, principally the Jobseeker's Allowance Regulations 1996. The point has been well made that the way in which we deal with regulations is unsatisfactory. That is especially true of those regulations, which are 160 pages long and more extensive than the original Bill, were laid before the House only at the end of December, are to be debated tonight in less than four hours and, crucially, are unamendable—at least by Labour Members. Suffice it to say at this late stage that I hope that we will introduce more sensible ways of dealing with regulations in the House to enable better parliamentary scrutiny on behalf of our constituents, to whom these matters are critical.

The main regulations refer to the jobseeker's allowance, but I shall briefly deal with the other regulations, which have not had proper debate in the time available. The Housing Benefit, Supply of Information and Council Tax Benefit (Amendment) Regulations amend the Housing Benefit (General) Regulations 1987 and the Council Tax Benefit (General) Regulations 1992. The new regulations extend housing benefit and council tax payments for four weeks to people who have been out of work and subsequently start work. That is clearly welcome.

Regulation 6 inserts new schedule 5A into the housing benefit regulations, and regulation 14 inserts a new schedule into the council tax benefit regulations to allow for extended payments. Eligibility is limited, however, to certain categories, which exclude one important group of people: the chronically sick or disabled who move into work. Regulations 6 and 14 make no provision for extended payments for people who move off incapacity benefit, severe disablement allowance or income support where a disability premium is payable on the ground of incapacity for work. Will the Minister explain the reasoning behind that exclusion and give a commitment to review the scheme's progress with a view to extending it to other groups? There are other points on those regulations to do with the linking rules and the way in which claims are processed, but I shall write to the Minister on those for detailed comment.

The Employer's Contributions Re-imbursement Regulations 1996 are welcome. However, regulation 2 provides for circumstances where someone is to be treated as entitled to jobseeker's allowance for two years immediately before employment. That can include periods when the claimant was in receipt of a training allowance, a carer or a lone parent. Again, there is no mention of disability. Will the Minister agree to review the position at the earliest opportunity with a view to extending the national insurance contribution holiday to employers recruiting disabled people who return to work?

The Social Security (Back to Work Bonus) Regulations were not even laid until last Thursday, so limiting even further the amount of time that hon. Members have had to scrutinise them. Clearly, the back-to-work bonus is the element of the jobseeker's allowance that the Government have promoted most. Although that bonus may receive a cautious welcome, it is no more than meagre window dressing of the whole range of measures. I shall do no more than quote Samuel Brittan, who said in the *Financial Times* on 20 October 1994:

> "The scheme is typical of the minimalist reform that civil servants with the Treasury breathing down their necks, produce for Conservative ministers".

Declaring earnings and calculating and allocating the bonus will require complicated and costly administrative and technical procedures and could result in disputes

[Mr. Keith Bradley]

between claimants and the Employment Service. Will the Minister confirm that all the necessary administrative arrangements, the computer system required and the training of staff to deal with the back-to-work bonus are in place and will be ready for implementation in October?

The main regulations relate to the jobseeker's allowance. As we have heard in elegant speeches from Labour Members, the crucial aspect of the new regulations is the benefit cut from 12 to six months, so moving people at an earlier stage to means-tested benefits. That is being introduced at a time when national insurance contributions have risen by more than 50 per cent.—from 6.5 per cent. in 1979 to 10 per cent now. With those regulations, people will pay more in work and receive less if they have the misfortune to become unemployed.

As we have heard, key groups of people will be especially disadvantaged by the regulations. We can highlight further the problems of people who have savings or who receive large redundancy payments. Those will be taken into account six months earlier. Those people may lose all entitlement to benefit because of those savings or redundancy payments.

Similarly, under new regulation 79 of the Jobseeker's Allowance Regulations, 18 to 24-year-olds will receive reduced benefit, although they may have paid the same amount of national insurance contributions as a person over 24 years of age. Will the Minister yet again explain why he believes that 24-year-olds have fewer costs and should therefore be entitled to less benefit than a 25-year-old?

Regulation 13 of the Jobseeker's Allowance Regulations affects disabled people. Sick and disabled people face particular problems from the combined effect of the jobseeker's allowance and incapacity benefit, which came into effect last April. The Government have said that, eventually, 250,000 people who would have qualified for invalidity benefit will not qualify for incapacity benefit and will have to claim jobseeker's allowance. Many sick and disabled people are especially concerned that they may fall through what may be described as the "incapacity trap". Some people will not be able to pass incapacity benefit's tighter incapacity test, but will still have severe problems that limit their opportunities to work.

To enable people entitled to incapacity benefit, who want to look for jobs, to claim JSA, the Government have allowed them to limit their job search in line with conditions under regulation 13(4). However, it is not clear how that will work in practice and how extensive the limitation will be. For example, will a person with sickle cell disease who wishes to claim disability benefit be able to avoid being forced into a job where there are cold or damp conditions? I am aware of a case in which an adjudication officer ruled that someone suffering from irritable bowel disease was available for work which started early in the morning—yet because of the disability that person could not be available. Will the Minister give us further details of how the regulation will work in practice?

There is not time to touch on the important issue of how hardship payments will be made and how vulnerable groups will be provided for. Suffice it to say that the amount of discretion allowed to adjudication officers will need to be monitored carefully.

There is also not time to do justice to regulation 46 on waiting days. Most of the alignment of JSA between unemployment benefit and income support regulations brought it into line with the latter, because the Government claim that that is a modern benefit and therefore more appropriate. However, for waiting days the alignment has been with unemployment benefit, so claimants will have to wait an extra three days before being entitled to benefit. Yet again, we are debating measures that are basically about finding the lowest common denominator to limit benefits in any way possible. Will the Minister comment on that?

I want to highlight the problems that have already been experienced because of the way that the administration of JSA has been piloted in different parts of the country. When the legislation was in Committee, we raised the potential problem of aligning the service under a one-stop agency. The practice of one benefit officer not only making a decision about someone's availability and eligibility for benefit, but informing that person that he will not receive any money, could lead to confrontation. There have already been disputes in various parts of the country, especially the north-east. Will the Minister assure us that all the fears that we expressed about the same officer dealing with the two aspects that I have mentioned have not proved to be valid? Will he confirm that all the relevant training of staff has been completed and that all the necessary administration is in place to ensure the smooth implementation of the new benefit?

It is clear from our debate tonight, our various discussions and the questions still being asked of Ministers that there is a real danger that the introduction of JSA will result in the same disarray as other measures such as the Child Support Agency. We know that JSA is not about helping people under a strategic welfare-to-work plan, but is a mean-minded attempt to cut benefit for unemployed people as part of the Government's aim further to reduce the social security budget and public expenditure to find money to fund tax cuts to bribe voters at the next general election. We know that that will not work.

We are disappointed that we have not had sufficient time to scrutinise the regulations. However, we are absolutely sure that when they are implemented it will be Conservative Members who will be looking at the fine print, because after the general election they will be, searching for jobs.

6.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Roger Evans): We have been debating the original Bill—now an Act—and the regulations over a considerable period and I therefore feel it fair to say that I am not surprised by the peroration of the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley), even if I disagree with it. Where was the flash of lightning? Where was the comment that no one expected? Where was the interesting idea?

The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) criticised the actions of previous Labour Governments in the same way that he criticised our actions—on a point of principle. He is not in his place, but I want to explain why I believe that his argument is fundamentally misconceived. He said that the arrangement in the regulations to alter the national insurance fund should be likened to a breach of contract.

In other words, he believes that an understanding reached at a particular point in time is binding on everybody for life. That is an interesting model, which is used in personal pension plans and retirement annuity contracts. It is the classic model of the private provision of a personal pension—someone pays in contributions for a certain period and at the end takes out of the fund what has been paid in, with the ability to sue if that amount is not actually paid.

The difficulty with the private model, ideal though it may be, is that it is not entirely followed in the private sector. With occupational pension schemes, discretion must be given to trustees over how much they will pay, especially when the payment is linked to final salary rather than what one puts in being what one gets out.

The free-market right argues for the privatisation of all national insurance schemes. However, the national insurance fund—rightly or wrongly, and it is a creature of some antiquity—has always been a public scheme regulated by successive Acts of Parliament and statutory instruments that Parliament approves. However, the House is an elected body and from time to time priorities alter. There has never been a pledge cast in concrete, unalterable from 1948 to the present day. Successive Governments have argued from time to time—not without some controversy as it is a serious matter—that the national insurance scheme should be slightly altered or reformed. That is what the regulations do.

I understand that Labour Members do not approve of many, if any, of the alterations. However, I believe the principle to be well established. We are entitled by Act and statutory instrument to alter the arrangements for the national insurance fund. I reject the moral charge that what we are doing is dishonourable. It may be a matter of controversy, but it is a perfectly acceptable action for a Government, of any persuasion, to take from time to time.

The two examples of unfair flexibilities in the regulations given by the hon. Member for Birkenhead—which he used to support his argument against flexibility—included the abolition of the long-term disregard for couples. In fact, the purpose of the back-to-work bonus is a much better way of helping that category and, indeed, a wider one. It is thought that currently only some 15,000 people benefit from the disregard.

I am glad to note that the hon. Gentleman has now returned to the Chamber. The second example he gave, which is a matter not of substance but simply of changing definitions in the context of a fluctuating education system, is the change from 21 hours to 16 guided learning hours. The Department believes that the effect of that on eligible people will be neutral. It is simply that the education system has altered its terminology. Instead of people being made to turn up and sit behind desks so that the number of hours can be measured, they now follow modules and have guided learning hours.

I contrast what I regarded as a serious attack—intellectually and morally—on what we are proposing with the views of the official Opposition, especially the Front-Bench team. The House was left baffled and bewildered about what the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) proposes to do in place of the Jobseekers Act and the regulations. He has fought them tooth and nail at every stage. He tabled a large number of amendments, many of which would have had the effect—or would have had if they had been agreed—only of increasing public expenditure and not carrying out the labour market improvements that we have effected.

Judging from his opening remarks, I thought that the hon. Member for Makerfield was going to oppose all the regulations, but his hon. Friend—

Mr. Ian McCartney *rose—*

Mr. Evans: I shall come to the specifics in a moment if the hon. Gentleman is patient. I thought that he was going to say that he opposed all the regulations, but the goodies—I gathered from the hon. Member for Withington—in the form of regulations dealing with the back-to-work bonus appeared to be welcome.

I come to the specific queries raised by the hon. Member for Makerfield. I am very conscious of the fact that I have been asked a large number of questions. I shall try to answer as many as I can, and I shall obviously write to hon. Members if I do not complete answering the very long list and I miss out sickle cell disease. That is a serious question, but very specific.

I begin with the general point made by the hon. Member for Makerfield. He was complaining about the lack of opportunity to discuss and amend the regulations and the skeleton nature of the Act. I regret the complexity, length and detail of the regulations. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan), but it is difficult to draft such regulations. They are long and complicated. My hon. Friend said that we had done a pretty good job. I merely suggest to him—and I can understand the arguments of the hon. Member for Makerfield on this point—that were we to have a bundle of private insurance policies to cover the range of misfortunes and disasters encompassed in the Act to fit the whole population of the United Kingdom, I doubt whether even the private sector, using the plainest of English, would manage to do it very quickly.

Mr. Frank Field: If we had private insurance policies, they could be enforced in the courts if the contractor broke his word—unlike the Government's national insurance scheme.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman did not hear my argument, although I appreciate the force of his point. Under a contract for a personal pension scheme, one pays in so much, one is entitled to the fund invested and one can withdraw it. That can be enforced as a ordinary contract. It is like buying an annuity; it is fixed and simple. The difficulty with that model is that under the occupational pension scheme, for example, which guarantees X per cent. of final salary, there cannot be a simple contract. Therefore, one has a system involving trustees, a comparable system of regulation and a comparable series of discretions. It is more complicated because of the flexibility necessary. In the case of the public system, Parliament has always been involved, and rightly so.

I return to the specific questions asked by the hon. Member for Makerfield. I accept his point on uprating, but he should bear in mind the relative absurdity at the moment, whereby two thirds of the people who are unemployed draw income support, not unemployment benefit. Whether they are better off on unemployment benefit or income support depends on whether unemployment benefit, being uprated by the retail prices

[Mr. Evans]

index, nudges ahead of income support, which is uprated by the Rossi index. That is simply the choice; there are two separate indices. The hon. Gentleman is of course right to say that one is a discretion and one is a mandate from Parliament, but there is a record of that.

Mr. Ian McCartney: Is that a commitment on the record that there will be an annual uprating of allowances?

Mr. Evans: It is a historical reflection on an accurate description of the state of law.

I am advised that regulation 9 has nothing to do with international law. On regulation 12, the new regulations, for very much the reasons given by the hon. Gentleman, are very detailed. That is their purpose. I give the assurance that training is being given and will be given to staff to implement those new regulations.

Mr. McCartney *rose—*

Mr. Evans: I should be delighted to give way, but I am concerned that I have only six minutes in which to deal with rather a lot of queries.

On regulation 18, the earring point as somebody helpfully called it, I ask the hon. Member for Makerfield to bear in mind the words of his hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), who said:

"If it is simply a matter of dress, deportment and drawing up a good curriculum vitae, or trying to motivate people, no one could object."—[*Official Report*, 24 October 1994; Vol. 248, c. 635.]

That is the responsible response to regulation 18, which will be applied reasonably by the Employment Service. There is also of course a right of appeal.

I was asked in respect of regulation 73 why the rule was drawn differently for England and Wales on one hand and Scotland and Northern Ireland on the other. That is simply because Scotland's education system has a different legislative structure and the terminology is different. Northern Ireland is not dealt with at all in the regulations. That is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who will deal with it in due course.

I was asked about regulation 17, which refers to the 13-week rule and temporary work. The point that the hon. Member for Makerfield did not seem to appreciate is that it is all very well talking about a permanent job when one is not working or not working regularly, but there comes a point at which the jobseeker's allowance must be about getting people back into full-time employment, not simply perpetuating short-time working.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about young people coming out of care. They will be a prescribed group and will be able to obtain the jobseeker's allowance without having to satisfy the severe hardship test. Young people generally will be able to restrict their availability to jobs offering suitable training.

The hon. Gentleman finally asked me whether students could be forced on to full-time training. I was a little concerned about the precise definition of the question, but as I understand it, the answer is that students who are part-time educated—up to 16 guided learning hours under the regulations or 21 hours under the existing regime—have of course to make themselves available for work. At the moment, the position is analogous to that referred to by the hon. Gentleman. A part-time student may have to drop an examination or the completion of a course because a job is offered of a certain sort, which satisfies all the characteristics.

The hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) asked whether benefit will cease if a claimant refuses any training scheme. I can assure her that sanctions will apply only to particular prescribed employment programmes and training schemes. The details of the framework for that are set out in regulation 75. For many years there have been mandatory programmes, which have a proven record.

The hon. Member for Rochdale further asked about the administrative training and other preparations necessary for the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance—a point taken up by the hon. Member for Withington. I can assure her that training has begun. It began in the summer of 1995. All staff will be trained to carry out the jobseeker's allowance functions for which they will be responsible in October 1996. We are confident that the computer systems will be ready as planned for model office testing in the summer and for implementation in due course in October.

The hon. Member for Withington asked whether the national insurance contribution holiday for long-term unemployed people of two years or more and the housing benefit and council tax run-on should be extended to disabled people. The measures are designed specifically to help the long-term unemployed get back into work. The issue of disability is separate and there is separate provision for it.

I repeat more specifically, in respect of the back-to-work bonus, that all necessary administration, computers and staff will be in place. I shall deal with all the other points in correspondence.

I commend the five statutory instruments to the House, as part of a firm-minded Government programme to promote employment.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 282, Noes 260.

Division No. 26] **[7.00 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*

Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smyth, The Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Derek Conway.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*

Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Eric Clarke and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Jobseeker's Allowance Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 19th December, be approved.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *then put the remaining Questions required to be put at that hour.*

Resolved,

That the draft Income Support (General) (Jobseeker's Allowance Consequential Amendments) Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 19th December, be approved.

That the draft Social Security (Back to Work Bonus) Regulations 1996, a copy of which was laid before this House on 10th January, be approved.

That the draft Housing Benefit, Supply of Information and Council Tax Benefit (Amendment) Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 19th December, be approved.

That the draft Employer's Contributions Re-imbursement Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 12th December, be approved.—*[Mr. Forth.]*

Orders of the Day

Education (Student Loans) Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New clause 3

COMMITMENT TO PAY SUBSIDY FOR PRIVATE SECTOR STUDENT LOANS NOT TO BE MADE BEFORE 31ST MAY 1997

'No commitment which would require the payment of subsidy under subsection 1(1A) of the Education (Student Loans) Act 1990 shall be entered into before 31st May 1997.'.—*[Mr. Byers.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

7.14 pm

Mr. Stephen Byers (Wallsend): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The need for the new clause arises because of the difficulties that the Government experienced in Committee, and it comes on top of a difficult couple of months for the Government on education matters. They have had to backtrack from their fast-track process of grant-maintained status for voluntary-aided schools. They have had difficulties with their nursery voucher scheme and with the four pilot authorities which have struggled to find sufficient places. On top of all that, the Minister had to announce on the second day of the Committee that the Government were unable to proceed according to their original timetable—which would have seen the Bill's proposals implemented by autumn this year—and would have to delay the implementation of the student loans measure by 12 months, so that the Bill's proposals will not start to be effective until autumn 1997.

Most hon. Members are aware that the proposals to privatise the student loans system appeared in the Queen's Speech very late in the day, and the measure was deemed necessary to appease those right-wing members of the parliamentary Conservative party who were desperate to have a privatisation measure somewhere in the Queen's Speech.

The Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way at such an early stage. I am sure that he does not mean quite what he says. This cannot be a privatisation of student loans, since—as the hon. Gentleman well knows—the Student Loans Company will continue to exist as an alternative source of lending for students. The hon. Gentleman might wish to clarify his unusually loose use of the term "privatise" in this case.

Mr. Byers: I do not want to embark on an exercise in semantics, although the Minister clearly would prefer that to a debate on the matters of substance that are before the House this evening. But even this Minister should accept that the Bill will mean that the private sector will have an opportunity to take part in the student loans system. It is a privatisation by any other name.

The point that the Minister is trying to avoid is that he proclaimed the importance of the measure on Second Reading and on the first day in Committee, and added that it was vital that steps were taken—almost in haste—to ensure that the benefits, as the Minister saw them, of the measure would be available to students by autumn this year. Just 48 hours later, however, the Minister had to announce that the Government were unable to proceed along the lines they had originally intended. Instead, he had to announce to the Committee in a very embarrassed way on 14 December—

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): My hon. Friend will not embarrass the Minister.

Mr. Byers: As my hon. Friend says, it is unusual for the Minister to be embarrassed, but, on this occasion, he was. On 14 December, he said:

"following our discussions with the banks, we have decided to defer the implementation of the loans scheme from October 1996 to October 1997."

That is significant because it means that the scheme will not be implemented until a few months after the general election. New clause 3 deals with that issue as it is intended to ensure that under the Bill, and then the Act, no contractually binding arrangement will be entered into by the Government to provide subsidies for private sector student loans before 31 May 1997.

New clause 3 is intended to ensure that a new Government—who will be elected by 31 May 1997, and, we expect, of a different political complexion—

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): There is absolutely no way that will happen.

Mr. Byers: We expect that we will have a Government of a different complexion, and therefore we feel that it is essential that that Government should have the freedom and flexibility to decide how to proceed and should not be tied into a contractually binding arrangement.

The thrust of the Minister's decision to defer implementation, as well as the nature of the public subsidies that will be made available to the private sector, is all to do with making the scheme attractive to the banks and other financial institutions, which he has accepted that it must be. When he announced the delay, he said:

"Following fruitful discussions with the banks to date, they have pointed out to us that, among other things, considerable changes to their information technology systems would be required to pick up the offer that we are making to them and that, obviously, the considerable merger activity taking place in some sectors of the financial institutions—mainly in building societies—would make it difficult for them to meet the tight deadline that we envisaged earlier."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 14 December 1995; c. 40.]

The Minister had to admit that. Two days before, however, he had argued and voted against a Labour proposal to delay the implementation for precisely that length of time.

The Opposition's concern is that because the Government are now desperate to ensure the implementation and delivery of the scheme by autumn 1997—which will require the active participation and involvement of the private sector—they will be prepared to offer a subsidy from the public purse, paid by the taxpayer to the private sector. In normal circumstances, that would be unacceptable. The Government, in desperation, have been forced into a corner with a deadline of their own making, and might well enter into a contractually binding agreement that might be in the

[Mr. Byers]

political interests of the Government but will not be in the long-term interests of the taxpayers and the students. That is why new clause 3 is particularly important.

One point that the Minister has failed to mention, arising from the delay that he announced on 14 December, is how the Government intend to make up the financial gap created as a result of the loss of the £100 million savings—which they announced in the Budget—that was expected to be accrued as a result of the student loans system privatisation coming into effect from autumn this year. Many of us are concerned that that £100 million will be found somewhere else in the education service.

The Minister has failed to give us any assurance on where that money will come from. It would greatly assist the House this evening if he would tell us where that money will be found. Is his silence a consequence of the fact that he knows that it will be taken away from other services within the Department for Education and Employment? He should identify this evening where it will come from.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): If the new clause were passed and a Labour Government were elected, how would the incoming Labour Government finance student loans?

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman was an active participant in the proceedings in Committee. We made it clear on numerous occasions which criteria and principles we would apply to the system of student financial support. We clearly said that we would strike a balance between the interests of students and the legitimate interests of the taxpayer and the Exchequer which took into consideration the need wherever possible not to push students into debt and poverty while they were studying.

Our system of student financial support will bear those two interests in mind. We will make positive proposals that may not be supported by Conservative Members but will have broad and popular support throughout the country, which the present student loans system clearly does not.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): Returning to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), can the hon. Gentleman tell us when he expects he will make known his proposals on this matter, and what the costs will be?

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman should not be so impatient. We will come forward in good time with our own—

Mr. Leigh: Come on.

Mr. Byers: "In good time" is the only answer that the hon. Gentleman will get from me this evening. We will come forward with positive and popular proposals, which will be of benefit to students and also recognise the demands that are made on the Exchequer. That is the balance that we will strike between the two, and we believe that we can provide financial support to students that reconciles those two conflicting interests.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, just before our meeting at Lancaster university, the Labour party research department issued a document which said that the Labour party would abolish all grants? I know that the Labour party wriggled and wriggled—*[Interruption.]* Do not natter when I am talking. I know that the Labour party wriggled and wriggled and wriggled on this matter, but that is what was published at the time. Can the hon. Gentleman give an absolute and categoric assurance that that policy will not be implemented? If he cannot, my students will be interested to know it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The hon. Gentleman would not be wise to respond to that point. The debate is going much wider than new clause 3.

Mr. Byers: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker; I shall address new clause 3 in accordance with your guidance. The hon. Lady's point is an important one which could usefully be debated at some future time, and there will no doubt be opportunities to do so. If the Government's business managers wish to arrange a suitable opportunity, they can do so.

New clause 3 would prevent the Government from entering into a contractually binding agreement with private providers which would entail payments of public subsidies before the next general election. Our concern is that, because they have got themselves into political difficulties, the Government will put their own interests first. The delay of implementation until the beginning of the academic year 1997-98 will certainly come some months after the last possible date of the next general election.

The importance of the new clause is that it would prevent a future Administration from being bound by any contractual arrangements entered into by the present Administration. That would be appropriate, and it might be important, because as the Minister himself said, on Second Reading:

> "Private financial institutions would be invited to bid for the right to offer subsidised loans. That would probably be for a period of five years."—[*Official Report*, 27 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 951.]

So any contractual agreement entered into by the Government would be likely to last throughout the period of the next Government. It would be inappropriate to tie the hands of a future Government in that way.

In Committee, the Government refused to accept any amendments to allow parliamentary scrutiny of the contractual arrangements between the Government and the banks, building societies and other financial institutions. Therefore, we have only a skeleton of a Bill. The interesting detail has not been revealed to hon. Members. Part of that detail will be the contractual agreements between the Government and private sector institutions. We believe that it is appropriate for that information to be made available to hon. Members before the Bill goes through all its stages.

The Minister has been steadfast in his refusal to disclose any details of discussions with institutions that might be interested in providing loans to students. Indeed, the Minister has not even been prepared to identify the institutions involved. No financial institution, bank or building society has been named by the Minister as being interested in taking part in the scheme. That raises the question of whether the financial institutions have any interest in taking part in the scheme.

7.30 pm

The Bill has been badly thought out, and the Government have tried to follow a highly restrictive and constrictive timetable. Sir Christopher Johnson, the former chief economic adviser to Lloyds bank, made an appropriate comment:

"There is every sign that a half-baked idea has been launched prematurely to get it into the Queen's Speech in time. Haste born of financial desperation is not a good recipe for fundamental reform."

We agree with that.

The Bill has been born out of haste and political expediency and that is why we are concerned about the nature of the contractual agreements that the Government will make. We have had no information from the Minister about the financial institutions that might be involved in the scheme, so we fear that the Government, for their own reasons, will make an agreement or contract that will not be in the long-term interests of the taxpayer or of students.

I shall give the House three examples of the possible results—if the subsidy were made available to private sector institutions—and the sort of agreements that could be made in a desperate attempt to ensure that the private sector was enticed into the new scheme. First, the details of the loan scheme are not be published and debated in principle in the House. They are dealt with annually by an order, brought forward by the Government. That order states clearly the amount of the loans being made available, the period for which the loans will be available and the rates of interest that can be charged for the loans. Under the existing regime, the loans are, in effect, made available free of interest. The level of public subsidy is then set at a rate high enough to cover the commercial return for the financial institutions. If the scheme is privatised, the taxpayers' subsidy would provide the profit for the bank involved.

We know from the Committee stage that a second regime was suggested to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment and to the Chancellor of the Exchequer by the student loans working group. The Minister was kind enough to acknowledge—48 hours later—that such a group existed and that it made recommendations to the Chancellor and the Secretary of State. He also acknowledged that the working group suggested two approaches. The first was the one which is now followed—the loans are interest free. The second possible approach identified by the working group was radically different, but the working group claimed it would be far more attractive to the financial institutions. It would require the students to pay a commercial rate on their loans, but they would have an interest-free period while they were studying. They would have to repay that interest when they entered the world of work.

The working group claimed that only a commercial rate would convince the private sector that it should become involved in the scheme, because it would then receive a flow of income that fully covered the cost of borrowing, administrative costs and an element of profit. That regime is a radical departure from the system that we now have.

The Opposition are worried that, because that second scheme would be commercially attractive to the private sector, it will become the preferred option and the Government in desperation will adopt it. If we pass the Bill without the new clause, we will give them the power and authority to do that. That would be inappropriate, and it would ensure that more students would regard higher education as no option for them if students were to be charged a commercial rate for their loan. We would welcome a guarantee from the Minister that that will not be an option that the Conservative Government, for as long as they are in office, will support. We hope that he can give that guarantee this evening.

The second result could be that the Government will try to come to a cosy arrangement with the financial institutions that are interested in taking up other governmental financial services work. One financial service that the Government have offered for many years is the Teachers Pensions Agency. It is a high-quality service, which is highly profitable and very desirable to the private sector. We know that six financial institutions are being considered by the Government with a view to one of them being given the contract to run the privatised—as it will be—Teachers Pensions Agency.

It is interesting that the Minister refused in Committee to deny that those six organisations—during their meetings with the Government to consider the privatisation of the agency, work that they would like to do—might be encouraged to take on responsibility for the student loans privatisation as part of the arrangements into which they enter. In that context, there would of course be discussion of the amount of public subsidy to be provided, and that subsidy might be hidden because it would come from the profits that those companies would receive from the privatisation of the Teachers' Pensions Agency. That sort of cosy arrangement would not be in the long-term interests either of the operation of the agency or of the British taxpayer.

The third and possibly most important reason why we are concerned and why we believe that new clause 3 is essential lies in the amount of subsidy to be provided by the taxpayer for the private sector. As the Bill stands, there will be no limits on the subsidy; we must rely on the negotiating skills of the Minister to secure a good deal for the British taxpayer. We do not believe that any Minister, let alone this one, should be given a blank cheque.

In Committee, we tabled a modest and reasonable proposal that the subsidy should be capped at no more than a quarter of the total value of the loan being provided. That was voted down by the Minister and his colleagues. We must, however, ensure value for money for the taxpayer. There are considerable doubts whether the Bill would guarantee to secure that.

The worries are that some sweetheart deal will be struck between the Government and the lender to save face, not to meet the interests and needs of the British public. Our view is that the taxpayer should not have to bail out the Government from the political difficulties that they have caused for themselves. If money is available, it is surely better to use it not to subsidise the banks but to expand the financial support that we give students.

That is all the more important when we hear, as we have in the past 24 hours, that for the first time in living memory the number of applicants to universities has fallen. The reason why universities and higher education in general are becoming less attractive to 17 and 18-year-olds considering applying is that the latter recognise that their friends and colleagues who have entered higher education have entered a world of debt and poverty. That acts as a massive disincentive.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that ridiculous point?

Mr. Byers: If the hon. Lady cares to rephrase her question, I am prepared to give way.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that precise point?

Mr. Byers: Yes.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: It is still a ridiculous one, though. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that my exceptionally well-run university has about 10 applicants for every place, and that some of its faculties attract about 100 for every place? We have absolutely no dearth of students applying even though they know perfectly well what the regime will be.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the hon. Gentleman replies, may I point out that he is getting close to a Second Reading debate?

Mr. Byers: I am rapidly coming to a conclusion. If the Government are providing money to subsidise the private student loan sector, their priorities must be questioned. Many of us think that the money would be better spent on financial support for students than on subsidising financial institutions with taxpayers' money.

The new clause deals with the concerns that I have expressed. It would ensure that a future Government would not have their hands tied, perhaps for as much as five years, by an agreement entered into for political expediency by this Government. I commend the new clause to the House.

7.45 pm

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Earlier, the Minister objected to my hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) calling the Bill a privatisation of student loans. Yet it was crystal clear from our discussions in Committee that if the scheme turned out so successful that the Student Loans Company ended up on its uppers, lending only to a tiny handful of students, that would be fine by the Minister, because he wants to open up the loans to as many financial institutions as happen to be interested.

Crucially, the amount of subsidy intended to be given to each bank has still not been revealed. We all know that the banks have expressed varying degrees of uninterest in the entire scheme—ranging from downright rejection to an expression of the view that a number of difficulties need to be overcome. Those difficulties include technological and merger problems.

The Minister claimed that it was not true that the banks were wholly uninterested: they were, he said, merely making opening moves in the negotiations. My hon. Friends will recall from serving on the Committee that the Minister seemed to think it laughable that the banks might mean what they are saying and that when they say no, they mean no. The clear implication is that the banks have only to keep on saying no to convince the Minister that they really mean yes—if the price is right.

We are talking about what may be immense subsidies of public money for these banks just to ensure that the Minister does not get egg on his face and can persuade an unembarrassing number of banks to take part. So the largesse will go to whichever banks can be persuaded to take part, if they ever can be.

This contrasts starkly with the treatment of the under-25s in respect of housing benefit, and with the treatment of students living in poverty. The citizens advice bureaux in Scotland and elsewhere have produced clear evidence of students in dire difficulty because of poverty. Thus the contrast between the treatment of the banks, which do not need the money, and the students, who do, is dramatic.

I was reminded of the Minister's view—that the banks do not really mean no when they say no—last night when I was re-reading "Pride and Prejudice", having recently watched the excellent BBC production of the novel. Everyone must be familiar with the character of Mr. Collins, and the part of the book in which he offers his hand in marriage to Elizabeth Bennet. She refuses, saying that she is quite sure that neither Mr. Collins' happiness nor her own would be enlarged by the prospect: under no circumstances would she marry him. He replies that he understands that young ladies may say no when they really mean yes, so he feels encouraged by her refusal.

What do the banks have to do to make the Minister understand that if they say no they really mean it? If the Minister thinks that he can persuade the banks to adopt this course, will he reveal what sums of money he has in mind?

Mr. Gordon Oakes (Halton): You and I have been in this House for a long time, Mr. Deputy Speaker. One of the advantages of the Report stage of a Bill is that it is brought back to the House. When I was Minister of State responsible for education, 17 years ago and dealing with higher education, funding students was a problem. Now, it is a far more acute problem because of the welcome increase in the number of people in universities and higher education.

I do not know what the Minister will say in reply to this debate, but he is looking a gift horse in the mouth if he rejects the new clause tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers). The new clause defers consideration of negotiations until after the next general election. No matter how long the Government limp on, 31 May of next year will be beyond the next election.

This is a most unwelcome Bill. Students do not want it and have never wanted it; the universities and vice-chancellors have never wanted it; the banks and building societies do not want it. The Government are considering the time factor—whether 31 May 1997, or today—in which they can bribe banks and building societies to engage in the Bill's provisions. Frankly, the banks and building societies do not want it. It is of no commercial interest to them.

I must tell my hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend that I thought some of the comments by Conservative Members very fair. They asked what the Opposition would do if the Bill were deferred until 31 May next year. As the Irishman said when asked how he would get to a certain place, my reply would be, "I would not start from here." I would not start from this Bill and I would abandon this process altogether.

We must grasp the fact that we now have a very large student population—a population that the nation finds it difficult to support financially. Whether a Conservative

Government are in office or we are in office, that is a fact that we have to face. Neither the Government nor we, the Opposition—I regret to say—have faced up to how we are to fund students.

Many schemes have been put forward and have been tinkered with or played with, but they have never really been considered due to political expediency, or whatever. One is the Australian scheme—Australian students repay loans through a statutory income tax system according to their degree and ability to pay. The vice-chancellors have put forward a scheme to the Government and the Opposition, suggesting ways to tackle the problem. The Australian scheme, the vice-chancellors' scheme or any other scheme bear no resemblance to the weird system that the Government propose, which will solve nothing.

Meanwhile, tens of thousands of students are living in poverty and misery, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) said, when they should be devoting their attention to their studies. Instead, they have to devote their attention to wondering where their next meal is coming from and that must be wrong.

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): My right hon. Friend might not be aware that the Minister made it clear in Committee that he did not believe that there was any connection between student poverty and the quality of students' educational performance.

Mr. Oakes: If the Minister tried to make that clear, it is the most nonsensical statement that I have heard. Every hon. Member, on both sides of the House, is aware of student poverty—not just poverty among working-class students, but among middle-class students and across the board. They will be the leaders of industry, the professions and academia in this country and that is the way that we treat them. The new clause gives the Government and my hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench time to think of an alternative to this ludicrous scheme, which no one loves.

One of the advantages of a Report stage is that another line can be put. I have served on many Standing Committees, as you have, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I know that members of such Committees look at the problem from the point of view of the Committee. The new clause will give more time and I hope, therefore, that when considering it the Minister will grasp the gift horse with which the Opposition have presented him and will willingly accept it, saying that negotiations shall not take place until after 31 May 1997. I hope that if we are in government, those negotiations will not take place at all because we will have a far better scheme for funding students than this ludicrous Government scheme.

Mr. Mike Hall (Warrington, South): First, I must repeat something that I said in the Standing Committee about the principle behind new clause 3. The new clause is uncontroversial, helpful and necessary and it will benefit the Government. It is in line with the Government's timetable for the introduction of the private sector into the payment of student loans.

I hope that the Minister will accept the new clause on behalf of the Government because it will improve a very poor Bill. As it stands, the Bill encapsulates everything that is wrong with the Tory party approach to government—it is an arrogant abuse of power. The Government do not seem to care that they have not been able to explain to Parliament the full costs of the measures included in the Bill. The Government are asking Parliament for a blank cheque. They are saying, "Pass this enabling Bill and allow the Government to get involved in the negotiations with the private banks and to provide subsidies to them to grant loans to students." They are saying that they are not prepared to tell us what the cost to the taxpayer will be or to say what the cost of the student loans will be. They are asking us to take it on trust and to take the Bill through.

The new clause straightforwardly states that the Government can go so far but that, given that they do not want to implement the Bill in the private sector until 1997, the new Parliament can decide whether it wishes to proceed with the measure. That is the real strength of the new clause. It will prevent the Government's arrogant abuse of power—the fact that they are not telling us how much they are prepared to commit to the scheme.

The new clause allows time for the Government to say that the negotiations have been completed and to tell us which high-street banks will become involved in private sector student loans. So far they have been unable to tell us and, if they have the information, they have refused to reveal it. I believe that they are not holding anything back because they do not know which banks will become involved. A number have said that they will not do so. The new clause will allow Parliament the full knowledge of which high-street banks and private institutions are prepared to get involved in the scheme and, therefore, strengthen the democratic process.

The new clause will also give us time to consider the effects on students. Opposition Members tried to do that in Standing Committee, but the Government strongly resisted it. The Government have given great consideration to the effects that certain changes that we tried to make in Committee would have on private financial institutions, but have had no regard whatsoever to the impact on students. On Second Reading, in Committee and on Report—and, I suspect, on Third Reading—we have had no sign from the Government of how the scheme will affect students. New clause 3 introduces a means by which those omissions can be overcome.

At the second sitting of the Committee—it was almost thrown in as an aside—the Minister announced that there would be a delay in the implementation of the scheme. Instead of being introduced by October 1996, it would be done by October 1997, which will be some time after the next general election. That delay will give the Government the opportunity to put right all the problems that they have created within the Bill. That is another good reason for the delay that new clause 3 would put on the face of the Bill.

The Conservative party has nothing to fear from the new clause. If it wins the election, which is highly unlikely and most improbable—

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: No.

Mr. Hall: The hon. Lady says no, but she is completely wrong, as she is on every other issue.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: No.

Mr. Hall: The hon. Lady continues to make the same mistakes. No doubt she will continue with the arrogant view that the Conservative party has nothing to fear from the electorate when it has everything to fear.

[Mr. Hall]

If the Tories win the election, they can proceed with the measure in the next Parliament. If they lose, the delay will allow the new, incoming Government, with a new mandate, to tackle the problem according to the promises in their election manifesto.

8 pm

The new clause strengthens the democratic process and is, therefore, nothing to fear. Accepting it would show, at this late stage, in the 17th year of the Conservative Government, that they have some regard to the democratic process. They would then be able to consider at length the principles involved in the Bill, which legislates for the use of taxpayers' money to subsidise private institutions to provide student loans. That is a crucial part of the Bill and represents a fundamental change from the current policy.

Parliament needs to give far more consideration to the principle of using taxpayers' money to subsidise banks to do the same business that they have carried out for years. Why do high-street banks or other financial institutions in the business of lending money need huge subsidies from the taxpayer to allow them to participate in the business in which they have been established for many years? That fundamental question goes to the core of the Bill and is one reason why new clause 3 is so important.

The new clause would allow proper parliamentary scrutiny. As I have said, although we have considered the Bill on Second Reading and in Standing Committee and we are now considering it on Report and no doubt will on Third Reading, we still do not know the precise cost to the taxpayer.

When the matter was raised in Committee, the Minister said that we will know the full cost to the taxpayer 12 months after the scheme has been implemented. Therefore, Parliament will not know how much the legislation will cost until October 1998. That is totally unsatisfactory and is an abuse of the democratic process.

Parliament needs to know the cost of the scheme and the new clause would allow us to address the errors in the Bill. It may well allow the Government to justify what we have said—that the estimated cost of the subsidy is £1,500 per loan. We used that figure throughout the Standing Committee and the Minister decided not to disavow it. He has made no comment whatsoever about the costs. Perhaps he is frightened to reveal them because he knows full well that the Government's use of money would create an outrage. Now he refuses to say whether the figure of £1,500 is right or wrong. The Minister may find it funny, but if the Government are prepared to subsidise high-street banks or private institutions at a cost of £1,500 per loan, perhaps they should give the money directly to the students and ease the problems of student poverty that has been well documented by my hon. Friends.

Implementation of the new clause would allow us to evaluate the effect of the Education (Student Loans) Bill on students. It is clear that the Government have been prepared to legislate to include discrimination. They decided that students should not be told why they may have been refused a private sector student loan; they see no reason why students need to know why they have been refused and they see nothing wrong in the institutions refusing the loans passing that information on to a third party. That is scandalous. It is an outrage in itself. The Government decided quite straightforwardly that there should be no appeals procedure. All that involves taxpayers' money to support our public education system. We need to build some accountability into that system and new clause 3 allows us to do that.

The Minister may respond by saying that the new clause expects him to negotiate on the Floor of the House the deals between the Government and the private sector. It does not. The Government can conduct their negotiations with the private sector, work out which banks are involved, produce the costs and tell us the implications of the scheme and that information will be available and ready to be used in the new Parliament on 31 May 1997, therefore the argument about negotiation on the Floor of the House does not hold water.

The other argument that the Minister used in Committee against the approach in new clause 3 was that it would delay the progress of the Bill. However, he has now delayed the progress of the Bill and moved the implementation date to October 1997, therefore there is no reason not to accept the new clause. The rationale of the arguments that the Government used in Committee does not apply. It does not stand up to scrutiny, so I hope that, even at this late stage, the Government will support the democratic process and allow hon. Members to do the job for which they were elected—to scrutinise legislation and improve it where they can.

Mr. Forth: We have not yet learnt what Opposition Members would do. I fought valiantly in Committee to winkle that out of them, but I failed totally. Yet again, the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) disappointed us, although he did not surprise us. It was also significant that the right hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Oakes), in the perceptive way that we would expect of a Member of such experience, said with some sadness that he could detect no policies emerging from the Labour party.

We learnt only one significant and interesting fact, for which I am grateful. The hon. Member for Wallsend accepts—by implication, so do his colleagues—that the general election will not take place until April or May 1997. That was a step in the right direction. It gives not just the debate, but other matters, an interesting perspective. I assume that he has the approval of the Leader of the Opposition in making that statement. If he has not, that is something for the hon. Gentleman to sort out. That is part of the background to new clause 3.

The other piece of background that the House will want to recall is that the measure was duly signalled in the normal way as part of the Government's programme. It received a Second Reading and was considered in Committee, where, as has been said, I resisted an Opposition amendment to put on the face the Bill an arbitrary delay in the implementation period.

I then announced a delay of one year, because, for perfectly practical reasons, the financial institutions that might be interested in picking up the opportunities offered in the Bill persuaded me—with no great difficulty—that it would take that length of time properly to put in place the procedures and mechanisms to give effect to the Bill's measures.

Mr. Hall: The Minister has just said that, during his discussions with the private sector institutions, they revealed that they would find it difficult to be ready for 1997, because of the information technology

requirements. That statement implies that certain institutions had expressed an interest in the Bill. At this late stage, will he tell us the names of the institutions involved?

Mr. Forth: The answer is no. I should correct the hon. Gentleman. The difficulty would have been with implementation in 1996, which was the original target date. There would be no difficulty with implementation in 1997, unless the House were to agree to the new clause—which I hope it will not—in which case there would be no possibility of meeting that target date for implementation in 1997. To implement the measure in time for the start of the 1997-98 academic year, contracts would have to be finalised by the mid-point of this year, to give the financial institutions sufficient time. To delay the Bill in the way that new clause 3 proposes would defer implementation until 1998, which would be unacceptable.

Another argument for new clause 3 is a constitutional theory of which I was not hitherto aware—that a Government are unable to make any new policies or commitments, or to promote their legislative programme, in the 15 to 18 months before the likely date of a general election—or, as the hon. Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Hall) told me, the actual date of the next general election. That is new stuff of which I was not aware.

I am not sure that new clause 3 is the correct vehicle for an entirely new constitutional theory that will guide us in the governance of this country. It seems that Opposition Members are persuaded that there must be a sterile period of 15 to 18 months before a possible general election, even though we generally do not know when a general election will be. That seems a complication, although Opposition Members seem secure in their knowledge that a general election will not occur until spring 1997. That is all a horrible muddle, and simply will not do.

I assume that it is not incompetence that has brought new clause 3 to the House this evening, but mischief. There has been an element of mischief-making in this Bill, which I accept in the spirit in which Opposition Members offer it, but anyone who pauses for thought will realise that the Government cannot accept the new clause.

We have made it clear that we want to introduce the measure as rapidly as possible, consistent with its being implemented in a proper fashion. I have been persuaded that it is reasonable to delay the provision for 12 months, and I believe it proper that we should now aim at the period of tendering, invitation and finalisation of contracts ending at the mid-point of 1996. That will give the financial institutions that come forward approximately one year in which to prepare, which is a reasonable and practical timetable for implementing the Bill. New clause 3 would undermine that process.

Mr. Hall: The Minister is hopeful that, by the mid-point of this year, it will be possible to finalise the financial institutions that will be involved. Can the Minister say today, in mid-January, which financial institutions are involved now? If the Minister hopes to finalise matters by the middle of this year, he must know now the institutions involved.

Mr. Forth: I cannot recall offhand the hon. Gentleman's career before he entered the House, but I believe that it was in education. I suspect that he does not have wide commercial experience, or he would realise the folly of his question. The term "commercial confidence" does not seem to have impinged on the hon. Gentleman's consciousness. If we were to proceed to make arrangements with private institutions in the way that the hon. Gentleman suggests, bandied names about in a loose fashion and revealed details of contractual agreements at every stage, that would effectively make any deal between Government and the private sector impossible.

That may be the way in which the hon. Gentleman envisages a Labour Government, if ever there were to be one, conducting themselves. Because the hon. Gentleman does not have wide commercial experience, he may be unaware of the difficulties that would be imposed. That cannot be the way to proceed because it would undermine the whole process.

If the hon. Gentleman is making a commitment on behalf of his party that, on any future occasion that a Labour Government had a requirement to deal with the private sector, that Government would follow the hon. Gentleman's precepts of naming names and making revelations of detailed contractual arrangements at every stage, we will take that into account. If the hon. Gentleman reflects for a moment, he will realise the folly of that approach.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Has the Minister received assurances from financial institutions that, once his legislation is in place, he will have the support of those institutions in implementing the new conditions?

8.15 pm

Mr. Forth: No, because we are nowhere near that stage. The institutions are aware of the direction in which the Bill is taking us, and we had considerable preliminary discussions with a wide range of financial institutions. The delay I mentioned was part of the result. The financial institutions persuaded us that the changes that they would have to make to their systems and other developments would make an implementation date of October 1996 impracticable. I was prepared to delay 12 months to give the institutions a reasonable opportunity to go through the tendering and contractual process, to establish their systems and to make other changes.

We have not reached the point about which the hon. Gentleman inquires. I envisage us doing so some time between spring and summer this year. At that stage, I will give the House as much information as I reasonably can, within the constraints that I explained. New clause 3 is either mischievous or ill-founded, or it has been tabled in the wrong debate, for the wrong Bill. It seeks to alter our constitutional arrangements. One way or another, I must ask the House to reject it.

Mr. Byers: As to the date of the next general election, and for the sake of clarity—

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): Wriggling.

Mr. Byers: I am not wriggling at all. We know that the Government want to hang on until Easter 1997, but we shall do all we can to ensure that does not happen. It is worth planning, on this occasion at least, on the basis that the Government and the Prime Minister may get what they want, which is why new clause 3 was tabled.

[Mr. Byers]

I was disappointed by the Minister's response. He failed to answer four specific questions. How do the Government intend to make up the £100 million deficit in the education budget as a result of the 12-month delay in implementing the measure? Will there be cuts elsewhere in the education budget? It would have been appropriate this evening for the Minister to give the House a reassurance that money will not be cut from other education services, or to identify precisely where cuts will be made. As it stands, £100 million of unspecified cuts will affect the education service in some way. I regret the Minister's failure to address that issue.

The Minister refused to give an assurance that the Government will not begin to charge a commercial rate for student loans, in accordance with the recommendation by the student loans working group to the Secretary of State and the Chancellor. The Minister confirmed that was one of two options, but he refused to give an assurance that that option will not be pursued. There has been no indication of the level of the taxpayers' subsidy to be made available to the private sector.

Finally, the Minister did not name one financial institution—be it a bank or a building society—that is interested in participating.

Mr. Hall: I noted the Government's spurious arguments about commercial confidentiality. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government have not even said how many institutions have been involved, let alone revealed their names?

Mr. Byers: I agree. It is not without precedent for the Government to identify organisations with which they are in discussion in relation to such matters. The Teachers Pensions Agency is a good example. The six interested financial institutions have been named, and they are in negotiations and discussions with the Government to determine which will be selected. The procedure has been used in the past. The Minister has refused to respond this evening, because there is no interest in the private sector.

Mrs. Fyfe: It is interesting that the Minister has also failed to make it clear that there is a possibility that a financial institution could receive a large amount of public subsidy, that a general election could take place, and that the institution could hang on to that subsidy although the process would not continue under a Labour Government.

Mr. Byers: That is another good reason why the new clause has considerable merit. We are disappointed that the Minister is not prepared to accept it, given the positive way in which it was introduced.

We have had a useful debate. We do not want to divide the House. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New clause 5

ESTABLISHMENT OF APPEALS PANEL IN RESPECT OF STUDENT LOANS

'( ) (1) The Secretary of State shall establish a Student Loans Appeals Panel ("the Panel") with the functions of investigating and adjudicating upon disputes between borrowers or intending borrowers (whether in respect of public or private sector student loans) and any person or body engaged in the making of such loans.

(2) The grounds of any dispute referred to the Panel under subsection (1) above may include—

(a) the refusal of a student loan; and

(b) the unreasonable disclosure to a third party of information relating to any applicant for a student loan held by any person or body engaged in the making of student loans under the Education (Student Loans) Act 1990.

(3) The Panel shall consist of three persons appointed by the Secretary of State, at least one of whom shall have recent employment experience in the field of higher or further education.

(4) Any party to a dispute referred to the Panel under subsection (1) above shall accede to any reasonable request to furnish the Panel with documents or information it requires in order to discharge its functions.'.—*[Mr. Byers.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Byers: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 4, in schedule, page 3, line 40, leave out from '(c)' to end of line 42 and insert

'sub-paragraph (5) shall be omitted.'.

Mr. Byers: The new clause would establish a new student appeals panel. As a consequence, we would need to delete the provisions contained within the Education (Student Loans) Act 1990 for the establishment of the independent assessor.

In Committee, the Government refused to accept any amendments aimed at providing students in both the private and public sectors with a right to appeal to the independent assessor. We felt it appropriate that, when a student applies for a loan and is then denied that loan, there should be an appeal mechanism.

At present, a student who is denied a loan by the Student Loans Company or is unhappy about the process or operation of that company may appeal to the independent assessor. We have had our reservations about the way in which the independent assessor has operated over the years. The operation has been limited in its application, and there has been a reluctance to publicise its workings. As a result, little use has been made of the independent assessor appeal procedure.

Nevertheless, it appears that the Government have recognised the failings of the process. The independent assessor is now conducting his business in a slightly different way, and is prepared to publicise the service he offers. The result has been—this may be because of some difficulties being experienced by the Student Loans Company as well—an increase in the number of students taking their cases to the assessor.

As the Bill stands, those students who wish to take out a loan with the private sector will have no one to go to to consider any grievance they might have. If they take their loans out with the already established Student Loans Company, the independent assessor will be available. We have two different systems. In one instance, the student will have the independent assessor, but if a student takes out a loan with a private sector institution, which is the Government's preferred option, there will be no appeal mechanism.

By means of the new clause, we seek to establish a mechanism to allow students to make an appeal. We list in the new clause the circumstances in which we feel that such an appeal might be made if an individual student felt a grievance.

It is important to recognise the emphasis that the Government are placing on the significance of the private sector element of the student loans system. The Minister has made it clear that, over a period, the Government want to see the majority of students taking out loans from private sector institutions. That means that the number of loans taken out with the Student Loans Company will reduce. We feel that it is appropriate that, in those circumstances, the majority of students, who will be dealing with private sector institutions, should have an appeal mechanism available to them if they have a grievance about the way in which they have been treated.

The Government—especially the Minister—have argued that it would be inappropriate to interfere in the manner in which private sector institutions conduct their business. They say that commercial decisions are for private sector institutions to make, and that it would be wrong for the Government to intervene or interfere in the way we propose. We disagree with that. We feel that there is a strong case for placing restrictions on the operation of private sector institutions.

In Committee, the Minister argued:

"there is no obligation on financial institutions to give their reasons for offering or withholding loan or other facilities. To put students into a mysterious different category from the rest of society would be extremely dubious."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 19 December 1995; c. 108.]

At another stage, in January, the Minister argued;

"People go to banks for loans to buy a home or a car, which may be an essential to their family, lifestyle or business. A student loan, albeit for something as important as education, is no more important than a loan for other essential purposes."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 9 January 1996; c. 134.]

That argument is fundamentally flawed. First, on principle, we cannot regard the necessity to take out a student loan—a student is being pushed into that position—as being on a par with taking out a loan for a car or for an extension to a house. We feel that students can be placed in a separate category.

First, the student loans system gives an entitlement to a student loan that is provided by statute. Students are treated by the Government through statute as being in a different and exceptional category. That being so, different and exceptional provisions can be made available. That is what we seek to do through new clause 5—to introduce a student appeal system.

Secondly, students will differ from other borrowers because their right to borrow exists only in so far as they are students. In general terms, their entitlement to borrow and the terms and conditions under which loans are made available are prescribed by Government.

We are also aware that, when many students apply for a loan, it is likely to be the first time that they have made such an application. A 17-year-old who is about to leave sixth form to go into higher education may make his first loan application at that stage. He or she may apply to a private sector institution. That institution can turn down that young person, as the Bill stands, without giving any reason for so doing. It may reach its decision on the basis of incorrect information. The student will never know about that because he or she will not be given a reason, yet the rest of his or her life will be blighted.

We are all aware that, if we apply for credit of any description—for a mortgage, for example—one of the main questions on the application form will be, "Have you ever been denied a loan—yes or no?" That poor student will have to say yes. He or she will not know why the loan has been denied. It is just that, for some reason, the private sector institution determines that he or she is not suitable to receive a loan from it.

Given the significance to the individual of being denied a loan from the private sector institution at 17, if that is to happen, the individual should at least be given an explanation why. As things currently stand, that is not so.

In Committee, the Minister was conscious of the problems that could arise as a result of someone being denied a loan, and showed his usual concern about these issues. He was very clear that there was really no need to worry, because, if a student was denied a loan by the private sector institution, the banking ombudsman would come galloping over the horizon to the student's rescue. The Minister made that clear in answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Hall), who asked where a student could take a grievance about being refused a private sector loan.

8.30 pm

The Minister replied:

"He would go exactly where students go to at the moment—to the banking ombudsman".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 9 January 1996; c. 135.]

Perhaps the Minister should have referred to the terms of reference of the banking ombudsman before making that comment. I have had the opportunity to do so, and it is clear that the banking ombudsman would have no status in considering a student's application that has been rejected by a private sector institution.

The limits on the ombudsman's powers are clearly stated:

"The Ombudsman shall have power to consider a complaint made to him except:—

(a) to the extent that the complaint relates to a Bank's commercial judgment in decisions about lending or security".

I am afraid that the Minister got it totally wrong in Standing Committee. The banking ombudsman has no part to play. If a student is denied a loan by a private sector institution, no one can intervene on the student's behalf. That is why new clause 5 is so important. The Minister was mistaken in Committee. He thought that the student had the right to raise the matter with the ombudsman. That is not the case. We need something in place that will allow the student to raise the matter so that further consideration can be given. New clause 5 puts such a mechanism in place.

In the light of those facts, I hope that the Minister will recognise, as he did in Committee, that there should be an avenue to consider these matters, because of the importance to the individual of having an application refused. I hope also that he will consider sympathetically the need for an appeals panel along the lines outlined in new clause 5.

Mrs. Fyfe: I support the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers), particularly about subsection (2)(a).

I appeal to the Minister once again to consider the refusal of a student loan. My hon. Friend pointed out that, when a student's loan application is refused, it could be as a result of wrong information, and that could affect him or her for a lifetime.

[Mrs. Fyfe]

In my constituency, an adult came to me because he could not understand why for years he was refused credit. In the end, it turned out that he had a common surname, and that someone else with the same surname and forename lived in a different tenement flat but the same tenement stair. That is a common problem in Scotland, as I hope the Minister will recognise, where so many tenement dwellings exist.

Wrong information could dog a person for years. It could, of course, be correct information, but perhaps the student comes from an area where bad debts are pretty rife, and far more common than the norm. In that case, such a decision could stay with the student for life, no matter how careful that individual was about repaying debts, and no matter how successful he or she turned out to be in a subsequent career after graduation.

The National Union of Students agreed with us, not surprisingly, that there is hardly any justice in an institution refusing to give a student information on why he or she has been refused a loan, yet at the same time being willing to disclose to third parties information about the student's financial situation, and whether to give a grant or loan. The Minister tabled an amendment to the Bill to protect students and graduates from unwanted mail shots that might result from that disclosure. Unwanted mail shots are the least of a person's worries; they can easily be thrown in the bin.

A student could be refused for unfair and inadequate reasons and would never know why, yet other financial institutions are allowed to have that information. There is no justice in that, and I hope that, at this eleventh hour, the Minister will change his mind.

Mr. Forth: Whatever happened to new Labour? I thought that we were told by the leader of the Labour party that this was the era of new Labour and stakeholders and all those exciting new visionary concepts. I thought that new Labour was at ease with capital and business and that it would be friendly with the City. Yet I think that the truth is rather more unpalatable. The reality is that Opposition Members either do not understand the way in which business and the commercial sectors operate, or—I suspect—are instinctively hostile to the concept of private business and what the private sector does. That surfaced in Committee and it has surfaced again.

As the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) pointed out, where the Student Loans Company currently operates, and where it will operate in future, there is an independent assessor to whom students can go if they are unhappy with the way in which the company has dealt with them. The hon. Gentleman knows, although he did not give the figure, that, in the year to July 1995, such was the extent of rife dissatisfaction with the Student Loans Company that the huge number of students who approached the assessor was five. Only five students went to the assessor and complained, one way or another, that they were not satisfied with what the Student Loans Company had done for them. I shall leave hon. Members to make their own judgment about the Student Loans Company on the basis of that information.

Opposition Members argue that it is necessary to have an independent assessor mechanism to protect individuals against a public sector monopoly provider, which is what the Student Loans Company hitherto has been, but then they argue that it is necessary to have the same mechanism to deal with private sector providers or lenders. That is not so for a whole number of reasons, not least because students will continue to have a choice not only on whether they deal with the private sector or the Student Loans Company but on which private sector provider to use. We are talking about a competitive environment where the student—the customer—has choice, as opposed to the public sector. Until the provisions of the Bill become effective, the student has no choice of where to go for a loan. There is a real difference between the private and the public sectors.

Mr. Byers: At the moment, the Student Loans Company is required to make available a loan to a student who applies for one. It has no choice in the matter. The private sector will be able to choose the students to whom it wishes to lend. It is the refusal of a loan application by a private sector institution that causes Opposition Members concern, because of the future implications of such a refusal. That is why we believe that an appeal mechanism is necessary.

Will the Minister address that issue and recognise that we cannot compare the necessities of the assessor for the Student Loans Company with that of a newly established private sector institution that is involved?

Mr. Forth: We must inevitably compare them, as students will. If the hon. Gentleman believes that students will be blighted by a fear of dealing with banks, in his scheme of things no student would approach a private lender, fearing the humiliation of being rejected. I do not think that students hesitate to ask banks for credit cards, loans or overdrafts. It is a matter for them, but they do it, apparently with maturity and confidence. Some may be turned down, but I doubt that their lives are blighted by that. The hon. Gentleman is making far too much of the issue.

The hon. Gentleman's point does, however, lead me to a worry about the new clause that is fundamental to my objection to what the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends suggest. New clause 5 asks for a student loans appeals panel

"with the functions of investigating and adjudicating upon disputes between borrowers or intending borrowers . . . and any person . . . engaged in the making of such loans."

I can interpret that, and the thrust of what Opposition Members have said, only as meaning that the body concerned would have the power to oblige a private lender to lend to an individual. That is a new and disturbing development in the thinking of Opposition Members: if they are suggesting that a statutory body should have power to oblige a private concern—a bank or building society, for instance—to lend to an individual, we are in new and dangerous territory. If the new clause does not mean that, I do not think that it means anything; so, one way or another, that is what it must mean. If all that the panel will say is, "Having looked into the matter, we rather regret that you did not lend that person any money," I am not sure what its establishment will achieve.

Mr. Byers: The Minister says that we are in "new and dangerous territory", but nothing could be further from the truth. We already have industrial tribunals, which do not require an employer to take an employee back if he does not wish to: we have a system of adjudication that

does not require a party to a dispute to do something that he may not want to do. That system works reasonably well in industrial tribunals, and we believe that it would also work well in the context of student loans.

Mr. Forth: In that case, I have doubts about the point or effectiveness of such a panel. Would it make financial awards? A tribunal can do that. Presumably, it could not undo the fact that a bank had turned down an applicant for a loan, so the blight that worries the hon. Gentleman would still exist. Disappointed students—with a blot on their record that will be with them for life—would, we now learn, have only the satisfaction of the fine that the panel would impose on the lender for having wrongly rejected the application.

The more we discuss the proposal, and the more detail I elicit from Opposition Members, the more absurd it becomes. I am suggesting that students should be able to choose between a number of private lenders and the Student Loans Company. There would still be an independent assessor to deal with the Student Loans Company, and the existing mechanisms of competition, the framework of law and all the other provisions that protect every citizen—including students—in regard to financial services would apply.

I believe that even young students are capable of learning how to deal with the various institutions, and possess the maturity and confidence to do so. I do not think it right to think of students as a special group that needs to be patronised, defended and protected at every turn, even when borrowing is involved.

Mr. Pickthall: In Committee, opposing our suggestions about income-contingent repayment, the Minister stressed that one of the main reasons for his opposition was the danger presented to confidentiality. Confidentiality was clearly important to him in that context; why is it irrelevant now?

Mr. Forth: I must ask the hon. Gentleman to explain himself. He has lost me.

Mr. Pickthall: I refer to the confidentiality that the panel would try to secure for a student whose application had been refused. In Committee, the Minister said that the need for confidentiality was his main reason for objecting to income-contingent repayments based on national insurance. Surely there is an inconsistency here.

8.45 pm

Mr. Forth: I did not say that that was the main reason for my objection; it was on a long list of powerful arguments that I advanced to explain why I was not enamoured of the idea of linking income contingency with national insurance contributions or income tax payments. As for confidentiality, I said then, and will say again, that a satisfactory number of arrangements exist to protect confidentiality in the context of financial services. That is the case now, and I expect it to continue to be so in the future. I was not persuaded then, and am not persuaded now, that any additional measures will be required. In any event, I do not accept that the measures proposed in the new clause and amendment are necessary, or would be particularly beneficial.

We are talking about students—young people, admittedly, but young people with intelligence and ability—learning to deal with different financial institutions for many different purposes. As I have said, they do that more than adequately now, and I am confident that they will continue to do so. I cannot agree with Opposition Members that we should single out students as a group, assuming that they are incompetent and that private lenders will spend all their time doing them down and gratuitously turning down their loan applications, with all the implications that that would have for the lenders' reputation and their competitive position.

Opposition Members have presented a false analysis. The new clause is unnecessary, and would damage the relationship between the Government and the private sector, a relationship about which those Opposition Members seem less concerned than their leader wishes to persuade us. I hope that the House will reject the new clause and the amendment.

Mr. Byers: The Minister suggests that it would be improper to single out students, but the Bill does precisely that: students are to be treated differently from other sections of the community. We feel that, when public money is involved—as it will be in this instance, because a subsidy from the taxpayer will be made available to the private sector—there is nothing wrong with attaching terms and conditions, especially when that is in the public interest. The establishment of a student loans appeals panel would allow proper consideration to be given to wrong decisions or the provision of erroneous information to the private sector institution involved, resulting in the denial of a loan.

As the Bill stands, a student cannot raise questions or appeal to any body about the refusal of a loan. Students can never know why their loans have been refused. The information involved may well be incorrect, but the student will be unaware of that. An appeals system would allow the information to be made available to an independent body, and would enable a student to find out why the loan was refused.

In Committee, the Minister clearly believed that there was an avenue of appeal to the banking ombudsman. That was his powerful argument. It is now clear that, under his terms of reference, the banking ombudsman cannot deal with such matters. The Minister should accept that he was incorrect in Committee, although he recognised the need for a body that could look at the matter. Given that the banking ombudsman cannot do that, we need a body that can consider those matters. We have advanced some powerful arguments for new clause 5, and we regret the Minister's refusal to accept it. However, the matter may be raised in another place and it is inappropriate to press the new clause to a Division. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 1

SUBSIDY IN RESPECT OF PRIVATE SECTOR STUDENT LOANS

Mr. Bryan Davies (Oldham, Central and Royton): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 13, at end add—

'(1B) The Secretary of State shall, as soon as any arrangements under subsection (1A) above have been concluded, lay before each House of Parliament a statement containing the names of any person with whom those arrangements have been concluded and the terms of the arrangements, including the amount of subsidy to be paid to each such person under that subsection.'.

[Mr. Bryan Davies]

The amendment seeks to establish the absolutely bare minimum of parliamentary scrutiny of the Government's measures. As my hon. Friends have repeatedly stressed, the Bill is skeletal, an enabling measure. It contains barely any detail of the new private sector student loans that will become operative. Parliament is being asked to give blanket authority to the Government to negotiate with the private sector as they see fit. The Minister wants authority for public expenditure subsidies of whatever order he considers necessary to persuade the banks and building societies to participate in the scheme.

We know from experience how liberal the Government can be with public money when it is used as a sweetener to ensure that their privatisation measures do not bite the dust. For example, the additional cost to the taxpayer of a privatised railway system will be £850 million a year, which is more than £2 million a day. The Government cannot even be trusted with taxpayers' money in connection with overseas projects and Governments. We all recall Pergau dam and it has not gone unnoticed that the chief whistleblower in that affair, the former permanent secretary to the Department for Education and Employment, is no longer in the Government's employ.

In deliberations in Standing Committee, the Minister repeatedly rejected arguments that would have allowed the House to examine the arrangements that he finally negotiates. He did that on the ground that Parliament cannot be involved in the negotiation of commercial contracts. The amendment simply asks the Minister to report in a full statement to the House the outcome of his negotiations—the details of the contracts when they have been concluded. That is often the practice in the House when significant commercial contracts involving public money are awarded. Sometimes even the Prime Minister chooses to give the House advance notice of a decision, as he helpfully did yesterday over Land Rover ambulances.

As the Bill stands, it will offer no opportunity for Parliament to question the Minister on his arrangements. That surely undermines the rights of the House. How can the Executive object to making a proper statement to the House on a new set of contracts of this kind? Should we simply accept that we have to read a press release on the outcome of the Minister's negotiations, or a written answer, or should we have to go to the Library to look at a document that the Minister has kindly put there?

Let us not forget the magnitude of the issue that we are considering. Outstanding student loans, that is, principal and interest, will total some £5 billion by the end of the decade. We are not debating a small matter: these are substantial commitments of resources. Public subsidies to the private sector will be very significant. As the Minister cannot tell us the amount of those subsidies, he should surely accept the responsibility of presenting a full statement to the House when he is in a position to do that.

The House has a right to expect answers to a number of key questions. What level of subsidy will be paid to private sector lenders? How much will private sector lenders obtain for administration costs, for interest rate subsidy and for default on loans? All those factors are significant in the current public sector scheme under the Student Loans Company. This is the crux of the matter. Huge subsidies will be needed if the banks and building societies are ever likely to get involved. Anyone who doubts that should consider the pronounced reluctance of financial institutions at this time.

The Minister wants to walk off with a blank cheque and does not want to account for how he spends it. That is scarcely standard commercial practice, unless one works for a financial institution such as Barings bank. Of course the House is aware of the close relationship between the Conservative party and Barings bank, which gave the party more than £600,000 between 1979 and 1993. Nick Leeson caused the ruin of one of the most reputable institutions in the City at the same time as he caused great damage to the cash flow of one of the least reputable institutions in politics—the Conservative party.

Unlike secret Conservative party accounts, the subsidies to the banks and building societies should be open to public and parliamentary scrutiny as soon as possible. For instance, we require an answer to the question whether the subsidies will include the start-up costs of new information technology systems for the banks and building societies. Considerable importance has been attached to that issue. Scratching for an explanation in Committee as to why the timetable for the Bill was proving so totally unrealistic, the Minister stated that one of the crucial factors was the problem of the need for new technology systems to handle student accounts.

Why on earth did it take the Minister until after the Bill had been presented to discover those matters? Why did he not carry out some serious investigations and make inquiries before it was presented? It is worth remembering that the Student Loans Company, for which the Minister bears some responsibility, has invested some £20 million in computer operating systems since 1990.

When asked in Committee by my hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) whether there would be a disclosure of the amount of public money that went towards the start-up costs in the private sector, the Minister said that he did not think that he could be specific at that stage, for the obvious reason that the detailed nature of the contractual arrangements had not yet been finalised. The Minister insists that we are obliged to accept that argument for the time being. But surely that question must be answered for Parliament to be satisfied with the Bill's provisions. The amendment gives the Minister the opportunity to assure the House that he will do that.

What about the public sector borrowing requirement effects of the scheme? When do Ministers expect the combined public and private sector loans scheme to secure public expenditure savings? When can we expect revised forecasts for the performance of the student loans scheme in its dual provision? What will be the exact terms and conditions attaching to student loans? How will repayment terms vary under the new scheme, and what repayment terms will be offered to students by different private sector providers? The Minister was exceedingly coy in Committee about even the basic principles upon which he was working when we questioned him on those matters.

Will the chosen private sector lenders offer sufficient geographical coverage in the United Kingdom? What guarantees do we have to ensure that all students in different localities throughout the country will be served by the new arrangements? Hon. Members will surely regard all that information as vital, but none of it is in

front of the House of Commons in definitive form. Unless the Minister can tell us otherwise, a revised tender document has not even been made available.

9 pm

Nor, significantly, do we know, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend said, how the Minister is making up the £100 million shortfall caused by the delayed introduction of his scheme. That figure will be of the greatest interest to all people in higher education who are wrestling with the savage implications of the 7 per cent. cut in recurrent and capital funding for next year. Is the higher education sector expected to bridge that shortfall with a further squeeze on its unit of resource? If so, that is to pile Pelion on Ossa. The Minister might have to bear some serious consequences should he attempt to go down that road.

Parliament cannot have any confidence in the new scheme when it is to be delayed for one year. The measure is short-sighted and ill considered. Surely, the Government have a duty to put flesh on the bare bones that they have offered to the House. That is why the amendment seeks a full statement from the Minister to the House at the appropriate time at the conclusion of his negotiations.

Mr. Forth: The hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Davies) makes a passionate request, but yet again, he is going not a little over the top. I have told him and the Committee—and I repeat to the House—that it is of course our intention that, when the Government finalise contractual arrangements with private lenders to give effect to the Bill's aims, I shall notify the House of those lenders. That is not a problem.

I have also said that details of public expenditure and private sector loans will be set out annually in the appropriation accounts and in the Department's annual report, and that all the normal arrangements of the National Audit Office and the other panoply of checks will apply in this case. That much is clear. When, however, the hon. Gentleman expects, as he does in the amendment, that the terms of the arrangements and details of contracts concluded—in this case, between the Government and private lenders—should be in the public domain, I cannot agree with him.

In Committee, I asked the hon. Gentleman whether he was giving an undertaking that any future Labour Government, in their dealings with the private sector across government, would publish in every case all the contracts in detail and all the contractual arrangements made between that Government and a private sector provider of goods or services. He did not give me an answer then and I suspect that he is not going to give me an answer now. If the amendment is a new enunciation of the doctrine that would form the basis of the relationship between thrusting, entrepreneurial new Labour and the private sector, which has been wooed by the hon. Gentleman's colleagues, I would be surprised, although many of my colleagues would not be.

This issue goes to the heart of the relationship between the Government of the day and the private sector. The relationship between this Government and the private sector is well established and well understood, but it is in the new clauses and amendments to this Bill of all Bills that we get a glimpse of the reality of Labour Members' attitude to the private sector, and of what their approach to that sector would be, were they ever to be in government.

I do not agree with the amendment because it takes us into territory that Conservative Members find unacceptable. It would undermine and prejudice the operation of the arrangements between the Government and the private sector. I urge to House to reject the amendment.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 247, Noes 278.

Division No. 27] **[9.04 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*

Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
McCartney, Robert
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Cummings and Mrs. Bridget Prentice.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N N'folk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W H'fordshire)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lester, Sir James *(Broxbowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga

Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Dr. Liam Fox and
Mr. Bowen Wells.

Question accordingly negatived.

Order for Third Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have to inform the House that Madam Speaker has not selected the reasoned amendment.

9.17 pm

Mr. Forth: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Our objectives in the Bill are simple and straightforward. We want to extend choice, competition and diversity in the provision of loans to students. Those are our fundamental principles in education, and indeed throughout the public sector. Through competition, student borrowers will get a better service and a better tailored product. Personal lending is best done by the banks and building societies—the experts, after all—and not necessarily by the Government. It is surely preferable that the enormous sums involved are raised and that the risks are largely borne by the private sector.

Any loan scheme has to balance the interests of the taxpayer and of the student. Our scheme offers preferential terms, including deferment and a retail prices index-linked interest rate for students, and a relatively short repayment period benefits the taxpayer. To that extent, our scheme is already income contingent. I am not persuaded that other schemes would offer a better balance.

We will have to wait to see whether Opposition Members want to shift the balance towards the taxpayer or the student, when they eventually decide what they want to do. At least we know that some Opposition Members appear to accept the principle of loans—five years after we debated the previous Education (Student Loans) Bill. I hope that we do not have to wait that long before we hear the Opposition's attitude to some of the more developed aspects of policy.

The Labour party aspires to be the party of business. Indeed, the matter was raised yet again while discussing the final amendment tabled on Report a few minutes ago. Yet given the opportunity to back choice and competition in the private sector, the Labour party has shown how truly empty its aspiration is—certainly in the context of the Bill. All that Labour could come up with was more or less pointless regulation and an inherent distrust of the private sector.

I believe that this modest Bill will move us forward significantly in quality and choice in the provision of loans to students. We have discussed it in detail in Committee and again on Report. The Bill, in its present form, will provide the ideal vehicle for the enhanced provision of loans to students, within the constraints of the existing regime. We should also bear it in mind that the new provision will exist in parallel with continuing provision from the Student Loans Company, which will continue to operate and to offer a choice between private and public sector loans. I hope that the House appreciates the merits of the Bill, however modest it may be. I ask the House to give it a Third Reading.

9.20 pm

Mr. Bryan Davies: I oppose Third Reading of the Bill. We are getting accustomed to the Government misusing the concept of choice in education. The choice that they suggest for school students and their parents frequently turns out to be choice by schools of students. Here we have the supposed extension of choice and opportunity to students. It is, however, clear that the choice will be exercised by banks and private institutions.

The Bill is an enabling Bill, without detail on the way in which the Government intend to act. It is without detail because there was not adequate preparation before it was introduced. The Bill was introduced in a tremendous rush, and that rush was born of one concept only—how to ensure that the Government could write into the budgetary forecast £100 million of savings from privatising an expensive part of the student loan provision. This first piece of legislation of the Government's last full parliamentary Session, the pathfinder of the Government's legislative programme, is sadly off course and is proving an appalling augury of the Government's Bills this Session.

[Mr. Bryan Davies]

Before the Bill was discussed in Committee, the Minister said that the whole issue was about breakneck speed and the necessity for extreme urgency in implementing the Bill. That urgency was, of course, born of an attempt to deliver £100 million of savings in the public sector in 1996-97. In Committee, the Minister admitted that the game was up for this year and that the Bill's real impact would be postponed until after the next general election, whenever that might be.

Why should Parliament indulge a Government on their last legs who seek to condition the actions of future Governments, against a background of their having manifestly failed to produce details of how the scheme should work and of there being no convincing sign that anyone supports the Bill, apart from Ministers and Conservative Back Benchers? Is there a single interest group concerned with higher education or any group concerned with the welfare of education that has had a good thing to say about the Bill? Why should the House grant power for subsidies to the private sector when critical assurances have not been given on how the Minister intends that the subsidies should be guarded?

In Committee and today, there has been no explanation of how the Minister will seek to give even limited protection to students—the remnants of a fair deal—before the legislation comes into force. What will dictate the allocation of loans to students will, of course, be straight commercial criteria. There will be no right of appeal for students and no guarantee that public money is being allocated on the basis of fair principles. The Minister believes in caveat emptor for students—they will have to look after themselves when dealing with the banks.

Moreover, the Government have learned nothing from the widely catalogued difficulties of the existing student loans scheme through the Student Loans Company. The present scheme is subject to almost universal criticism, yet the Minister has made no concession at all to that. He gave no concession to any concept that loans should be repaid on the basis of income contingency, and he made no attempt to recognise what is needed to support a learning-centred society.

The Government have thrown away an opportunity to consider how to guarantee the numbers of students in higher education adequately, and to guarantee that students are properly resourced on a fair basis to ensure that the country develops the skill levels that we desperately need. Instead, the Minister has produced a Bill that merely builds on the weaknesses of the existing system. The Bill is modelled on a scheme that has been subject to criticism on every side. Instead of using the opportunity to think afresh and to produce a new and good scheme—of which many models have been put before the Minister in recent years—the Minister has produced two bad schemes. The House should reject the Bill.

9.26 pm

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): When I was trying to sell the concept of student loans as a junior Minister in the mid-1980s, one of the many objections I heard was that the scheme was the thin end of the wedge. I was careful at the time not to deny that; frankly, I believe that the wedge has a long way to go.

I disagree with nothing in the Bill, but I would add a footnote. The way in which our universities and higher education establishments are developing means that, one of these days, we will have to drive that wedge in further to sustain the undoubted quality of our system. Hon. Members on both sides of the House will have to start thinking and talking about contributions to higher education fees, and not just what we are discussing in the Bill—student loans for maintenance.

That suggestion is recognised by honest Opposition Members, notably the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), who has come up with the notion of a graduate tax. I do not think that Conservative Members should dismiss that proposal out of hand on partisan grounds. As a Chamber, as a House of Commons and as a country, we face the problem of how to finance the tripling in the number of students without going down the road of some of our continental partners, who provide a low-grade mass higher education system. We do not want that.

There are some signs of an increasing lack of facilities, and there is news today of an increase in the drop-out rate. One of the great things about our system was that we had a low drop-out rate, and we should read the warning signs and try to be as honest as we can in electoral and partisan terms about this matter. I am not such a fool as not to realise that that suggestion is electoral dynamite, because we are talking about some form or other of contribution from the middle classes towards the maintenance of the high standard of a system which their children preponderantly benefit from. That was not a very good sentence, and I am sorry about that.

I do not want to criticise the Government and, having been in at the beginning of the process, I understand the circumstances and why they are introducing the measure. This is not the end of the process, however. It is a thin wedge, but if we want to maintain the high quality of higher education, the Government—or Labour, if it takes power—will have to force the wedge in deeper. Funds will have to come from outside the Government, and that will involve some form of contribution towards university fees.

9.28 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) is right to challenge all political parties as he has done. The sadness is that the Bill does not address that challenge, which must be addressed. It is a desperate measure which has been hastily prepared and introduced. The Bill's passage through the House, as the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope) was keen for me to point out to the House, is a further example of the chaos and confusion created by the Government. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I thought that Labour Members would like that.

Although there may be some merit in sharing loan risk with the private sector, in many respects the Bill fails. It fails to tackle the real problems of student debt and poverty. Despite what the Minister told us in Committee, student debt and poverty have an impact on the quality of students' learning, and are at least in part responsible for the unacceptably large number of students who simply do not complete their courses, creating a real waste of talent.

The Bill fails to provide support where support is urgently needed, for part-time students in higher and further education. It is particularly important that we should be considering those students this year, which is the European Year of Lifelong Learning.

The Bill fails to consider the possibility of moving from a mortgage-type repayment scheme to an income-contingent repayment scheme, which would be fairer to the borrowers and much more secure for the lenders. The Bill fails to meet the legitimate demands for parliamentary scrutiny, and it even fails to ensure that higher education institutions are properly recompensed for the costs that they incur in the administration of the proposed scheme.

The scheme has failed, above all, to attract the rush by the private sector to become involved with the scheme that the Government assumed would occur. The Government's failure to attract the private sector has meant that, only two months after the Chancellor's Budget, the education budget is now £100 million adrift.

When the Bill was introduced, it looked weak and pallid. As we studied the Bill in much more detail in Committee, it became apparent that it was seriously ill. The building societies and the banks are avoiding it like one would avoid a contagious disease. It is a sad and miserable Bill, and hon. Members should put it out of its misery by declining to give it a Third Reading.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 276, Noes 247.

Division No. 28] **[9.30 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael

Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Roger Knapman and Mr. Patrick McLoughlin.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
McCartney, Robert
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Cummings and Mrs. Bridget Prentice.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Have you had any request for a statement from any Scottish Office Minister about some remarkable developments in the Scottish Office information directorate tonight?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I have had no request for any statements on any subjects.

Mr. Salmond: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it a new point of order?

Mr. Salmond: Yes. Is it within the province of the Chair to consider "Questions of Procedure for Ministers", as issued by the Cabinet Office of May 1992? As you may know, this morning the Secretary of State missed an important debate on the cold weather in Scotland to deliver a speech in Scotland which, to many people, seemed to consider some political elements. A section of that speech was subsequently withdrawn by the Scottish Office information directorate, although the text was delivered verbatim by the Secretary of State. The director of the directorate—a former press officer for Westminister City Council—has been forced to apologise—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has been here long enough to know that that is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Salmond: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it on an entirely new subject?

Mr. Salmond: It is within the province of the Chair to consider a breach of "Questions of Procedure for Ministers"—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that it is not for him to decide what is within the province of the Chair. That is for the Chair to decide. I call the Minister for Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell).

Mr. Salmond: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can the Chair advise me whether it is in order for me to raise what is an admitted breach by the Scottish Office of "Questions of Procedure for Ministers", when the director of the Scottish Office information directorate has been forced—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am happy to advise the hon. Member that matters of ministerial procedure are entirely a matter for the Prime Minister and are nothing to do with the Chair.

Mr. Salmond *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has had three bites at the same cherry. That is quite enough for this time of night.

Potato Marketing Scheme

9.46 pm

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Mr. Tim Boswell): I beg to move,

That the draft Potato Marketing Scheme (Commencement of Revocation Period) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 12th December, be approved.

The draft order is presented in accordance with the requirements of the Agriculture Act 1993. Its purpose is to specify the date 12 months from which the potato marketing scheme will be revoked. The order is straightforward, therefore, but at the time of the debates on the Agriculture Bill in 1993 concerns were expressed about the future of the scheme. I will attempt to show that those concerns are now both misplaced and out of date.

I shall begin by briefly reminding the House of the background. The 1993 Act gave Ministers power to revoke the potato marketing scheme should they consider it necessary or in the public interest. In debate on the Act, which aroused considerable interest both here and in another place, Ministers made it clear that no decision had been made as to revocation of the scheme. Indeed, the then Minister, now Secretary of State for Education and Employment—my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard), whom we are pleased to welcome to the Front Bench tonight—made it clear that she wished to consider all the arguments at first hand before coming to any decision. That she did, with considerable care. As a result, she made the definitive announcement in November 1993 that, on both trading and deregulatory grounds, the scheme must come to an end. In that, she was echoing the recommendations of the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Communities which, when examining the Commission's proposal for a common organisation of the market in potatoes, concluded that, even if there were no agreements on such a regime, Britain should not continue to impose unilateral market controls.

That Committee believed, as the Government now believe, that Britain would be better able to compete in Europe without the constraints of the potato marketing scheme.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): Will my hon. Friend confirm for the benefit of farmers in my constituency that British and European farmers will operate on a level playing field without benefit to our European competitors?

Mr. Boswell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point. We seek a level playing field for our farmers in this as in other respects. I shall explain to the House in a moment the nature of the present provisions and the advantages of a lightweight regime in effecting that.

Indeed, there is a suggestion that my hon. Friend has reiterated that a link should be forged between agreement on a potato regime and revocation of the scheme. I intend to show that such a linkage is not only invalid, but would be damaging to our interests. As that is an important point, I shall explain it in a few moments.

Returning to the history of the matter, in announcing the intention to revoke the scheme—in 1993, as the House will recall—the Government recognised the need that was expressed within and outside the industry for it to have

[Mr. Boswell]

time to adapt to the conditions of the free market. The scheme was therefore allowed to continue in a modified form for three years. The modifications were based on suggestions by the Potato Marketing Board and the National Farmers Union. I shall not go into detail as to the modifications. Suffice it to say that they all led towards loosening the quota controls operated by the board, removal of intervention buying and reducing the administration costs of the scheme.

The industry has made excellent use of the intervening period. All the modifications requested by Ministers were speedily introduced and so much progress has been made towards the free market that the board has already decided that it will not operate quota controls this year. That means that there will be a de facto free market in 1996—a full year before the scheme is revoked. That is evidence of an adapting and forward-looking industry of which the free market need have no fears.

We have now completed all the necessary preliminaries to laying the draft order. They included consultation of representatives of producers, purchasers, retailers and consumers of potatoes as required by section 25(3) of the 1993 Act.

The draft order simply specifies 1 July 1996 as the first day of the 12-month period, at the end of which the potato marketing scheme will be revoked. That means that the scheme itself will come to an end on 30 June 1997. The reason for selecting the June date is not arbitrary; it marks the end of the potato marketing year and is therefore the most convenient transition date for all concerned.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Will the Minister confirm that that is the earliest date to wind up the scheme and that he has the power to extend the scheme if necessary? Will he use that power if he is not confident that there is a level playing field across Europe?

Mr. Boswell: I shall explain to the House why it would be positively inimical to the interests of growers to continue with a scheme that is past its sell-by date, which is bureaucratic and which shackles the ability of the industry to respond to the new, free market conditions. I advise the House to accept the link between those two terms.

Mr. Paul Marland (West Gloucestershire): Will my hon. Friend explain to the House what mechanism will be in place to ensure that our European partners do not favour their own industries with domestic assistance? I do not know whether it is just the potato growers in the Forest of Dean, but I suspect that throughout Gloucestershire—and I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) feels the same—there is considerable suspicion among potato farmers that other Governments may not treat the matter in the same way as we do. Burnt into our memories is the fact that when the French decided to take on the British turkey industry, the turkey processors were awarded a grant of 120 per cent. to build a turkey processing plant in Brittany in breach of the rules and regulations. Can my hon. Friend reassure the potato growers in Gloucestershire?

Mr. Boswell: I can tell my hon. Friend, who is much respected in agricultural circles, that there is widespread concern on exactly that point. It is the clear wish of producers that there should be, as far as humanly possible, a level playing field. In recent years, producers have done quite well—as is shown by their export performance—within the existing system, where there is no common organisation of the market. To effect the competition rules against state aids—my hon. Friend will be aware that those rules operate only where state aids distort competition, not automatically—it would be necessary to specify that in some common organisation of the market. That is a clear interest in having a so-called lightweight regime, to which I shall return. I thought it sensible to take time to explain that point, because of the concern felt by many hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Within six months of the order's commencement date, section 27(1) of the 1993 Act requires the board to apply to the Agriculture Ministers for approval of a scheme to transfer its property, rights and liabilities to a successor body or bodies—unless growers, in a poll, tell it not to do so. The 1993 Act was framed specifically to allow for a successor, so that the desirable activities of the board—I emphasise that they are desirable activities—in research, promotion and information on behalf of the industry could continue. The Act allows for one of three different types of successor—a development council, registered company or friendly society. Our consultation revealed widespread support in the industry for a body funded by levy to succeed the board, which means in effect a development council.

The House will be interested and, I hope, encouraged to know that not only has the industry agreed on the necessity for a levy-funded successor body to the board but all sectors of the industry have reached consensus on the form that such a body should take. I am not in a position to comment today on the detail of the industry's proposals, as it will be for the board to present proposals to Ministers for approval at the appropriate time, if growers wish.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Can my hon. Friend assure the House that any body established on the levy principle will be answerable not just to the Minister but primarily to the growers, as the payers of the levy?

Mr. Boswell: I understand my hon. Friend's feelings. Appointments to a development council, particularly in the new climate set by the Nolan committee, cannot be in any sense dictated in advance, but are the responsibility of Ministers taking advice. There can be no narrow constituency that automatically entitles one particular group of interests to a seat on the board. If my hon. Friend considers the experience of existing development councils, although occasionally they are not without their critics, they broadly represent the interests of those concerned in the industry. I am sensitive to my hon. Friend's point and hope that he will be sensitive to the constitutional propriety that I described.

The House will appreciate that details of the successor body are not yet available, but the fact that consensus on such a body exists is another testimony to the potato industry's progressive attitude.

I return to the linkage of the revocation of our scheme with agreement on a common agricultural policy regime for potatoes. The Government are well aware of and sensitive to widespread concern within the industry that a lightweight European Union regime for potatoes should

be introduced as soon as possible, to remove national aids currently operating in other member states. The UK has been the only member state that has consistently supported the European Commission's proposals for just such a regime.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Will the Minister confirm that there is not an EU potato regime and that any such regime that may be established, no matter how lightweight, will cost a considerable amount of money?

Mr. Boswell: I can tell the hon. Gentleman immediately, if he is in any doubt, that there is not an EU potato regime. I do not agree with him about cost. We do not wish to involve ourselves in a regime that is inordinately expensive. One of the concerns expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House has been the high costs of the withdrawal and intervention system in the separate area of fruit and vegetables. That is exactly what we do not want. Nor do we want to tip the discussion into a mode where we end up having it against our will. We would resist that firmly. That is why we have been consistent supporters of the Commission's proposals for a regime.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): The only supporter.

Mr. Boswell: I am sure that it is nice occasionally to be on the side of the Commission.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister pressed the Spanish—

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Will the Minister confirm that he is winding up a scheme which is costing the taxpayer nothing, or next to nothing, and calling for the introduction of a European scheme that is likely to cost something quite significant?

Mr. Boswell: I cannot accept what the hon. Gentleman says about the likely cost of the European scheme. The purpose of a lightweight regime is primarily to safeguard our position on unfair and distorted competition through national aids. That is what we conceive as the main objective. The costs, if any, would be cast with that objective in view.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: If it is, as the Minister says, that Britain is the only country in the Community that is prepared to accept the Commission's proposals and he does not want a regime that will cost money while all the other states clearly do, on what basis can he possibly say that when the present scheme is ended at the beginning of July, he will be able to deliver his undertakings?

Mr. Boswell: The hon. Gentleman, in his anxiety to interrupt me, has jumped to the wrong conclusion. It is by no means the case that other member states want a heavyweight regime with the full works of intervention, or whatever. There are many member states that do not want a regime. We are interested in and prepared to support one. As I have already said, British potato growers have been doing very well. We are confident that they will do even better when the board is not round their necks.

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): Is not the reality that it is most unlikely that we shall be able to negotiate a potato regime with the other members of the EU? It suits them well to intervene nationally to help their potato growers. The great merit of our Potato Marketing Board in the past has been that it has kept supply and demand reasonably in balance without imposing any costs on the British taxpayer. What will happen to the British potato grower the next time we have a glut of potatoes in Britain and in the rest of Europe, when all the European Governments will be subsidising their growers and we will not be helping ours?

Mr. Boswell: With great respect, I do not accept that the practice of subsidising potato growers is by any means universal in the Community among other member states. I understand the concern that my hon. Friend expressed so eloquently during the passage of previous legislation, when he advocated a control system with quotas and the maintenance of the familiar system of the Potato Marketing Board, even though it is in abeyance for this year. Our view, from the experience of member states that do not have such a regime and quota control, and from the experience of British growers who have been able to export competitively into Europe, is that whether or not we achieve a lightweight regime, it would still be justified to wind up the board, which is the expectation of the industry, and the Potato Marketing Board is anxious to make progress to pave the way for the establishment of a successor body.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): Will the Minister give way on that point?

Mr. Boswell: I have given way many times. Hon. Members may make their speeches in a moment.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Boswell: I shall give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Bellingham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, as I know that he has nearly finished. One point that he has not touched on, however, is the cost of winding up the board. He will be aware that there are producer assets with the board and they may well be used entirely on redundancies, property, pensions and so on. Will he please comment on that important point?

Mr. Boswell: I am aware of the overall situation. There is little indication that the overall liabilities of the board under winding-up procedures are likely to exceed its assets. It is likely to be positive and there are, of course, provisions in any winding-up scheme to deal with the situation if there is no transition to a successor body. To introduce the principle of Government subsidy for winding-up costs would be a difficult precedent. It was not adopted, for example, in relation to the milk marketing scheme, nor would it be justified in principle, however seductively my hon. Friend makes the point, because it is claimed that the board has been run as a producer organisation, and although there have been safeguards for consumers, the board has been for the benefit of producers over the years, and they have incurred some responsibilities as well as benefits. We think that they should meet those obligations, and I have every reason to think that that will be possible.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): I am sure that my hon. Friend will concede that the board is being wound up at the behest of Government. Surely there is some moral

[Mr. Christopher Gill]

obligation, therefore, on the Government to fund these costs, as the board could not possibly have forecast them when it was making its future plans all those years ago.

Mr. Boswell: I think that my hon. Friend will be able to share with me some of the memories of the early years of the board. I am looking back to the end of de-control some 40 years ago. I am not sure that that is particularly helpful to the present case. I am saying that I do not believe that it is right to use taxpayers' money to add to the assets of the board on its winding up when we have not been prepared to do that for other marketing schemes.

We do not believe that there is any justification for further delay in taking the final steps towards a free market. Our side of the contribution is the revocation of the scheme. For its part, the board has worked very hard with other organisations in the industry to ensure that it is in a position to submit proposals for a successor by the end of this year. In fact, it wishes to put its proposals to growers during the next few weeks. It will be greatly assisted in that process by the fact that the necessary order has been approved. Therefore, I commend the order to the House.

10.7 pm

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): I did not realise that there were so many jokes about potatoes until earlier this evening. As hon. Members went past, we heard, "That lot over there get their chips", "The Minister is in a soup", "Boil them in oil!" and similar jokes.

Mr. Home Robertson: That is the lightweight regime.

Mrs. Golding: That is right. I must say that the jokes were very repetitive, and I shall not repeat all of them.

Mr. Pawsey: There was the one about stakeholder and chips.

Mrs. Golding: Hon. Members missed that one.

Tonight we are talking seriously about potatoes. If there is one thing that Ministers should understand, it is the anxiety that is caused by occupational uncertainty and insecurity. The Government have, of course, brought their own troubles on themselves and deserve the retribution that they will undoubtedly face. Unfortunately, they have also blighted the lives of so many others who deserve better, including the blameless potato growers. In abolishing the very successful potato marketing scheme while neglecting to meet the legitimate needs of growers in other respects, the Government have once again put ideology before the welfare of people who want only to do a useful job for the country—*[Interruption.]*—unlike Conservative Members who are interrupting.

The Government's case against the potato marketing scheme was put during proceedings on the Agriculture Bill 1993. I do not intend to plough that field again; suffice it to say that the scheme was supported strongly by farmers in a ballot. They considered that it not only provided Britain with a steady supply of good-quality potatoes, but gave growers fair incomes at no cost to the taxpayer.

Mr. Stevenson: In his perambulation around the issue, the Minister failed to mention the impact on prices for the consumer. He did mention the deregulation of the milk marketing arrangements, which resulted in significant price increases. I believe that increases will be inevitable when the Potato Marketing Board is disbanded. Would my hon. Friend care to comment on the Minister's omission?

Mrs. Golding: Nowadays, the Government are not interested in the cost to the consumer and the taxpayer.

Mr. Boswell: I welcome the hon. Lady to her first debate speaking from the Front Bench. Why does she expect the lifting of a quota regime, and the concomitant increase in flexibility and freedom of supply, to lead to an overall rise in prices?

Mrs. Golding: That is what the Minister said about the Milk Marketing Board. Yesterday, people in Birmingham expressed a very different view. The Potato Processors Association takes a more optimistic view of the abolition of the scheme, but it does not appear to have as much at risk as the growers.

The argument this evening relates chiefly to time, and to the Government's lackadaisical attitude. It is about not ideology, but incompetence and a lack of effort. The Minister will be aware of the excellent, practical, pragmatic brief sent to hon. Members by the National Farmers Union in London and the Scottish NFU. Their argument, in a nutshell, is that the Government should not destroy what we have until they have something to put in its place. It is a sensible and reasonable petition.

The growers have done everything possible to save the situation themselves. As the Minister is well aware, the NFU has said:

> "During the last two years, the Potato Marketing Board has, with the support of growers and the NFU, laid aside its quota and intervention arrangements, reduced its staff and board numbers, welcomed further industry wide involvement, and cut by half its levy on growers".

The NFU has bent over backwards to give Ministers what they wanted—the removal of quotas, a year earlier than the Minister wanted, as he has admitted; an increase in planting thresholds; the end of intervention buying; a reduction in the levy to a level appropriate for the funding of the board's other activities, such as research, promotion and the provision of market information; a reduction in the board's membership; and the ending of licensing and registration of potato merchants. Unfortunately, the Government have failed to match its efforts.

The growers would have liked to keep the potato marketing scheme—hence the ballot. At the very least, they want a reasonable alternative. As they see it, the Government have severely constrained the industry's choice of replacement arrangements while making no progress towards a free and fair European market.

As the House knows, the Agriculture Act 1993 provides three possible options. The first is a development council based in statute, which could impose a compulsory levy; the second is a friendly society; and the third is a company. When he announced the results of his consultation just before Christmas, the Minister stated that there was widespread support for an industry body, which would be funded by a strategy levy, to succeed the Potato Marketing Board, and he said that it would be for the board to develop appropriate proposals if that was what growers wanted. That is what growers want.

The NFU insists on the need for a compulsory levy, for which only the first option provides. It also wants those who pay the levy to have control, but apparently that is being resisted by officials. Will the Minister give a clear answer to the growers' question? Can they have a compulsory levy over which they have control?

The NFU is also concerned about the European dimension, as are some others. The Government have sunk the lifeboat that was provided for 60 years by the potato marketing scheme. What are they doing to ensure that growers are thrown the lifebelt of a lightweight EU potato regime? The impression given by the Government is that, far from running for the lifebelt, they have neither the wit nor the will to do anything other than watch the growers go under. They have long since forgotten the fine words in Standing Committee when the then Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), now the Secretary of State for the Environment, uttered sentiments and said that no sensible Government would stand aside and say, "Let the Dutch take over," or, "Let the French subsidise their industry into defeating ours." He also said that he wanted to get rid of other countries' support for their potato organisations. Those are fine words.

Mr. Marland: It is a terrible indictment of British potato growers by the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman to say that, as a result of this measure, British potato growers will go under and that the entire needs of British potato eaters will be imported from Holland. Does she really mean that?

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): That is not what my hon. Friend said.

Mr. Marland: That is indeed what the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) said. Does she believe that British potato growers are so gutless and uninventive that they will stand back and watch the Dutch potato growers swamp the market? Potato growers throughout the UK should understand exactly what the hon. Lady says about them.

Mrs. Golding: It is nice to listen to the hon. Gentleman and to know that, in addition to Opposition Members, a Conservative Member wishes to support potato growers. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman should listen to what I have to say. I assure him that we are committed to supporting potato growers and we want to ensure that they have fair competition. The hon. Gentleman, of all people, should understand that.

As I have said, the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal used fine words in Committee, but the NFU says that foreign growers are supported. There is support in surplus seasons to retain productive capacity; support for processing facilities, production and research; and support for exports to the British home and export markets. The Government appear to be doing nothing about that, and that is one of the matters on which I take issue with the Minister. It is not the Minister but we who are pressing the Government to do something.

To stop other Governments undermining our growers, the growers are asking for those common rules of competition that an EU lightweight scheme would provide, and they seek a scheme that would avoid the market support regime, with the highly expensive policy of intervention buying that is wanted by some countries. The NFU believes that

"the Minister should undertake that, in good time before the scheme is revoked he will make a statement to the House, supported by a written report, indicating

1. The action which the UK Government has taken to secure common rules of competition in the European Potato Market, and particularly whether or not there will be a lightweight regime in place by 30 June 1997.

2. The results of a UK investigation into the state of competition in the European potato market at that time, including all available information on EU Member State aids.

3. The measures that the Minister proposes to take which will ensure that the GB potato industry can compete on even terms in the European market after June 1997."

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Hon. Members: Not to him.

Mrs. Golding: I will give way.

Mr. Walker: Opposition Members will know that my constituency has a large potato growing area.

Mr. Home Robertson: It is represented by one.

Mr. Walker: I listen to the laird with great interest. As an ordinary working-class chap, I am always fascinated by what he says.

Will the hon. Lady tell the House how a Labour Government, if we ever have one, would ensure that all her proposals would be forced through the European Union—how that would be achieved? We would be interested to know how the Opposition would deal with qualified majority voting.

Mrs. Golding: This is, of course, a typical question. When Conservative Members are in a mess, have got rid of something that they know works, and do not know what to put in its place, they ask the Opposition what they would do.

The NFU says:

"If other European producers are still in a position to receive national support GB producers will expect equivalent support."

It would be helpful if the Minister responded to the NFU position and to one other important point included in the NFU brief. It states:

"the PMB is being wound up purely as a result of UK Government policy."

Remember the ballot. It goes on:

"The majority of producer assets in the PMB are likely to be spent in meeting the wind-up costs in relation to property, redundancies and pensions. We seek a commitment from the Minister that the Government will meet a significant proportion of the costs of winding up the Board."

Mr. Boswell: Is that a spending pledge? If so, has it been cleared with the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown)?

Mrs. Golding: Another Minister is looking for the Opposition to get him out of a mess. He should never have got rid of the board. If he had abided by the NFU's ballot, he would not have done so.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Raymond S. Robertson): That is not an answer.

Mrs. Golding: That is the answer.

[Mrs. Golding]

To express again our strong support for potato growers, and yet again to register our complete dissatisfaction with the Government and their incompetence, I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote against the order.

10.23 pm

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): Since I have been in the House, I have sought to represent the interests of potato growers in my constituency of North Thanet. One of the most contentious things that I am likely to say tonight is that they grow the finest potatoes in the United Kingdom and, probably, in Europe. I appreciate that my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) and hon. Friends representing the Forest of Dean, seats in Norfolk and elsewhere might find that difficult to comprehend, but we in Thanet have significant potato growers of first early and main crop potatoes.

When I first arrived in Thanet, I was most compelled by growers' concern about the damage that the Potato Marketing Board and the regime were doing to their business. They cited two counts—first, that they were subjected to quotas, and secondly, that they were subjected to a levy. The quotas were especially damaging to the crops of first early growers, who faced ludicrous competition, especially from the French growers who did not have quotas and were dumping potatoes willy-nilly in the United Kingdom. Buyers in Covent Garden were sending back locally grown and excellent potatoes on quality grounds simply because they had already committed themselves to, and had to pay for, overseas products. The businesses also found the levy intolerable. They could not understand why a Conservative Government were allowing the continuation of a regime that placed such controls upon them.

One of the first things that I had to do as the newly elected parliamentary representative was to prevail upon my colleagues in the Ministry to abolish the potato marketing regime. I am absolutely delighted that tonight we are witnessing the dying throes of a regime that placed ludicrous controls on some of the finest potato growers in the world.

At that time, the growth in the potato consumption market was, as it is now, almost exclusively in processed potatoes. Then, as now, the housewife did not wish to peel spuds. I took the trouble—which I doubt Labour Members have done—to visit the potato processing plants being established throughout Holland and northern France, where processors knew that they had access to good, reliable, cheap and abundant crops. That investment was made on the European mainland rather than in the United Kingdom, largely because of the restrictions imposed upon our growers by the Potato Marketing Board.

The growth in the potato consumption market is still in processed potatoes. Thank heavens that there is at last investment in potato processing plant in the United Kingdom. It is creating jobs. The processing business is now aware that it can rely on an unregulated crop, free of quotas, from the United Kingdom. I regard that as progress. I am sad that no Labour Member—or, indeed any of my hon. Friends—has mentioned that point.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. I shall be brief. When he went to inspect the Dutch processing industry, did he ascertain whether it received any state aid?

Mr. Gale: I was about to deal with precisely that point. We want a level playing field. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] Labour Members moan and groan, but their Front-Bench spokesman made a plea for state subsidy—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Yes. The hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) said that other countries were subsidising plant and crops and pleaded for some of that for Britain. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Yes, she did. I want none of that. *[Interruption.]* I wish Labour Members would listen.

I did not stand here 10 years ago and I do not stand here tonight arguing for deregulation of the United Kingdom market, solely to see the imposition of regulation and subsidy in Holland and France, just 20 miles across the channel from my constituency. I agree with my hon. Friend the Minister's view of the need for a light European Union regime. Subsidy is outside European regulation—it is not permitted, nor should it be. I simply want to know that the Government will take a robust view of any hint of any kind of subsidy to our competitors on the European mainland. Having deregulated the industry in this country, having freed up our farmers to create the crop that we need, having seen the investment in plant that we wanted, I do not expect that plant to be supplied by cheap, subsidised products from either France or Holland.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gale: No, I will not give way. Stick to soup.

The signs are that the regime will be succeeded by a development council funded by a levy on producers. That is what the producers in my constituency want. Indeed, my constituent Richard Ash made that point to me only yesterday. The producers are paying the fiddler and they wish to call the tune. They want that development council to be answerable to them, the farmers, not simply to Ministers. Can we have that assurance?

I have listened carefully to the arguments concerning wind-up costs and money that may be left over from the Potato Marketing Board. I do not expect pensioners in North Thanet as taxpayers, any more than I expect pensioners anywhere else in the United Kingdom, to subsidise the wind-up costs of the Potato Marketing Board. My hon. Friend the Minister has said that there is likely to be surplus money after the wind-up costs have been paid. If that is so, will he assure me that that money will be paid directly to the development council to help it launch its work?

10.30 pm

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): I speak as a Member who represents a new potato growing area in Pembrokeshire that rightly has an excellent reputation. My growers are telling me, through the National Farmers Union and the Potato Marketing Board, that the commitments that they have been seeking from the Government before winding up the marketing scheme have not been given. That has certainly been confirmed by what the Minister has said tonight.

Absolutely no commitments have been given about a fair and open market in Europe or about the reduction or elimination of state aids to growers in our competitor countries, regardless of whether they are on the Iberian peninsula, or in Italy, France or Greece. All the Minister has been able to tell us is that, on our own, the Government, with the support of the Commission, are in agreement. Every other state, which is subsidising its growers in one form or another, is opposed to the Commission's proposition for a lightweight regime.

The hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) could not have been listening to what the Minister was saying, because the latter made it quite clear that there was no way in which he could give any guarantee whatever that, by the time the scheme is wound up, there will be a level playing field—as it is called—or that there will be fair competition and no state aids.

I am concerned because the new potato market is extremely sensitive to competition, especially unfair competition. New potatoes have a very short season. We already have traditional competition from the near east, north Africa and southern states of Europe. There is concern that, if the protection—admittedly, it is only in the form of support by the growers—is removed in a year or two, there will be problems. There have already been problems over the past few years. The winter might be long or the spring wet. Certain problems always arise.

Without protection, and because the Government have failed totally to eliminate unfair competition in Europe, growers will undoubtedly go to the wall. The market is incredibly competitive. All it takes is a wet week or a wet fortnight, and the window for the market of premature new potatoes is lost.

Until the Government can give the growers the assurances they are seeking, which they have certainly failed to give tonight, the growers, through the farming unions and the Potato Marketing Board, will be very disturbed about the fact that the Government are going ahead with the revocation, willy-nilly and irrespective of what is happening in Europe.

The Minister rightly praised the work of the Potato Marketing Board, and its progress since the Agriculture Act 1993. I am sure that Members on both sides have received a letter from the chairman of the Potato Marketing Board highlighting the three commitments it seeks. The first is an assurance that

"British potato growers will be able to compete on even terms with their EU counterparts after the end of the Scheme".

The second commitment that the board seeks is a

"strong statement that the UK Government will do all in its power to ensure that EU member states are not able to provide state aids to their producers when British growers can not enjoy similar support. This should be achieved preferably by seeking the introduction of a lightweight EU potato regime".

The third commitment sought relates to the winding-up costs of the board.

The chairman, whom the Minister has congratulated, says that he believes that, if those commitments are satisfied, British growers can compete satisfactorily in this country and in the export market. He then says that, as long as the commitments are given, the vast majority of potato growers will accept the ending of the scheme and the move to deregulate the market.

However, that acceptance is conditional on the first two commitments in particular being given. As the Minister has absolutely failed even to address those issues properly tonight and has not given any commitments, the Opposition will oppose the revocation.

10.35 pm

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): I represent an area that grows a lot of potatoes, both early potatoes and early main crop potatoes for the crisps industry—crispers, as they are called. Most of that production takes place on a contract basis.

I must confess that when, under the Agriculture Act 1993, we took the first step towards the abolition of the Potato Marketing Board, I expected an outcry from some of my farmers, but not from all of them, because some of the farmers in my constituency have been very much against the workings of the board. However, I thought that those who supported the board—possibly the majority of farmers in my constituency—would be extremely worried.

All I can tell the House is that I have not had a single letter or telephone call. I addressed the Penzance branch of the National Farmers Union just before Christmas, and no one mentioned the factors that have featured in our debate tonight. Like every other hon. Member who has a constituency interest, I have had the documents from the NFU and the Potato Marketing Board that have been quoted. I am not in any way trying to rubbish the points they make. Obviously, there is concern on the part of the NFU and the board. I can report only that individual growers—I have a lot of them in my constituency—have not voiced those concerns to me.

Although, in more recent years, the Potato Marketing Board has come in for some criticism, not least from the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale), in whose constituency the campaign against the Potato Marketing Board was centred, it is right to pay tribute to the work done by the board over many years. I know some dedicated people in my constituency, such as Mr. John Badcock, who served on the board for many years. It is only right that we should pay tribute to those people.

I came to the conclusion, however, that the system we had some years ago could not be sustained, for the very reason given by my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet—that it did not make sense to have a quota system that exposed us to competition, especially in the processed area, from countries that did not have a quota system.

Since the changes were announced in the Agriculture Act 1993, the potato industry has begun to make the necessary changes, and has adapted to the situation. Therefore, I am somewhat reassured. However, I share the fears being expressed on national aids, and when or if evidence is produced—none has been produced so far tonight—that some member states are making unfair use of national aids to distort competition, the Government will have to take action under the competition sections of the treaty, because that power exists.

I am also reassured by my hon. Friend the Minister's comments about the costs of winding up the scheme, because he made it clear that the board is likely to have a surplus to disburse, so there will be no need to go back to the industry for extra money to meet the winding-up costs.

Mr. Boswell: May I clarify a point that my hon. Friend has raised, and to which my hon. Friend the Member for

[Mr. Boswell]

North Thanet (Mr. Gale) also referred? The existing board has been making provision for its winding-up costs, and there is a reference in the board's annual report to the position of pension funds under the board. The likelihood is that, if there is a surplus in assets, it will be possible to transfer those under any proposed scheme to a successor body. If that does not happen, funds will be redistributed to the producers.

Mr. Harris: I am most reassured by that. I wish to re-emphasise a point that I tried to raise in an intervention—that, when a new system is introduced, the growers themselves should be in charge of it. That is a very important point.

I end on a topical issue. Brown rot is a matter of extreme concern to growers, particularly in Cornwall. I ask for an assurance that the Government will maintain their checks for brown rot on seed potatoes coming into this country from Holland. On balance, I would conclude that the House should approve the order.

10.41 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am glad to follow the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), if only to endorse his point about brown rot, which is extremely serious in our part of the country. The hon. Gentleman was lucky if, in the time he attended the annual meeting of the county branch of the NFU in Truro last Friday, he was not lobbied about the order, because I was. I was at the meeting in the latter part of the day—the hon. Gentleman was there earlier—and the issue came up several times.

The hon. Member for St. Ives has been misled. The issue tonight is not whether we keep the scheme in place but what will replace it and when. That is the question, and I very much hope that the Minister will listen carefully to the wise words of the hon. Member for East Lindsey (Sir P. Tapsell). The hon. Gentleman intervened to say that, if the scheme is swept away without real progress for the regime throughout Europe, our growers will be exposed to a most intolerable situation.

Before I return to that matter, I wish to deal with one or two misconceptions. Some hon. Members may have received a briefing from the Potato Processors Association. I think that the hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) quoted from it.

Mr. Gale: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tyler: No, I have very little time, and the hon. Gentleman did not give way during his speech.

The association's briefing states:

"last season, processors of frozen potato products and par fries increased their usage of potatoes in UK factories by 10 per cent. whilst imports of processed products reduced by 24 per cent."

That gives the impression that everything is wonderful, that growers are doing very well and that imports are being cut. But we must recognise the very special climatic conditions that affect this sector of the industry.

In 1993-94—the year before the one referred to in the briefing—there was a poor, wet and cold season, after which the harvest collapsed. In previous years, those latest import figures were nothing like as encouraging as implied by that brief.

It is misleading for hon. Members to be given that impression. I hope that the Minister will not rely on that. It is certainly not true that growers are doing so well that the scheme can be cheerfully dumped. That is the first correction that I want to make.

Mr. Boswell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tyler: The Minister will have a chance to reply to the debate. I want to be as brief as possible, in case other hon. Members wish to speak.

The Minister implied that it was impossible—I think that he used that very word—for the new development council to be truly accountable to growers. He made that point twice. He said that there was no precedent. There is a precedent. The Scottish Seed Development Council includes several direct grower representatives. The Minister can quote no precedent for the position that he now describes. It is an illusion to lead us up that blind alley.

The Minister said that there was no precedent for sharing the costs of abolition as opposed to putting the whole burden on the growers who have contributed all these years to the success of the scheme and the board. He has not been at the Ministry long, whereas I have now shadowed four Ministers. The precedent is that, when changes were made to the sheep variable premium scheme and the beef premium scheme, the Meat and Livestock Commission was compensated by MAFF. There is a precedent for a contribution from the Government.

I do not think that any of the Ministers on the Treasury Bench now were involved in the Committee which considered the Agriculture Bill. Few of the Opposition Members present this evening were involved, but I was. The text that we were given then did not come from the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard). She was not the Minister. The Minister was the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer).

I and my fellow members of that Committee remember extremely well that the Minister did not deign to appear at many of the sittings of the Committee, but he did appear to give some explicit assurances—hon. Members on both sides of the House will recall them—about the circumstances in which he would agree to the abolition of the potato marketing scheme.

The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal gave us the following assurance to encourage us to agree to the abolition of the scheme:

"I want a system under which no country tries unfairly to promote its own potatoes against other countries' so that we can all use the single market to sell our products. I want that because I think that British potatoes are good potatoes, that our producers and processors are of a high quality, and that we could beat the lot of them. We could do that only if we operated on a fair and equal basis . . .

Most of those countries that want a heavy regime would prefer a light regime to no regime if that were the only proposal on offer. Most of those countries that would prefer no regime will recognise in the end that they cannot have both no regime and a level playing field. They must decide which they prefer. In almost every case—I say almost because I have learnt not to say every—they will plump for a lightweight regime.

We shall find ourselves with the package of a lightweight regime, which will be supported by enough countries for it to be accepted. That is the best assessment of what is the overwhelming likelihood. It could be that, for some reason which I have not detected, what I think is extremely likely to occur does not occur, but that is the best advice I can give to the Committee."

That was the advice given to Members on both sides of the Committee. Conservative Members, Opposition Members, and I, as spokesman for Liberal Democrats, accepted in good faith the assurance that we were given by the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal.

The right hon. Gentleman continued in the Standing Committee:

"I am merely saying that, without the very likely European regime, if it became clear that Britain was shooting itself in the foot by continuing the current potato marketing regime, no sensible Government would stand aside and say, 'Let the Dutch take it over. Let the French subsidise their industry into defeating ours.' In those circumstances, we would take measures, which would have to be approved by affirmative resolution, to replace the current potato marketing scheme with those elements that benefit us in the quest for export and import substitution and remove those elements that disadvantage us."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee F*, 4 May 1993; c. 225-27.]

The Minister has not come before the House with any of the measures that his predecessor promised that Committee. We were fooled then into believing that he would. I hope that the House will recognise that we are being led up the garden path tonight.

The growers deserve nothing less than the fulfilment of that ministerial promise. I know that some Conservative Members share my concerns; they have expressed them privately and publicly; they have expressed them to growers; they have expressed them to the National Farmers Union. I hope that they will not let down the growers tonight.

There is no urgency about the passage of this order tonight. We could now insist that Ministers be held to their promise and that we get what they promised us. The growers must be given the explicit assurance that Ministers will now face up to the threat of predatory support by other member states' Governments to assist our competitors in the European Union.

The Minister tonight admitted failure so far. Why should that be a reason to trust the Government to achieve something in the future? Nothing has yet been achieved. The House of Commons must insist that Ministers be held to account for the promises that they have made.

10.50 pm

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South-West): What we are discussing this evening will not improve Britain's agriculture one iota. Deregulation of potato marketing is another example of the Tory policy of removing the steering wheel in the blind hope that that will make the car lighter and more efficient—ignoring the vehicle's susceptibility to crash.

I remind the House that the horrendous effects of BSE on the beef industry are a direct result of deregulation. Allowing the rendering industry to lower its temperature and solvent extraction standards to save a few pounds resulted in an epidemic that has cost the taxpayer over £200 million, and has cost farmers dearly.

Deregulation of the crop acreage of potatoes will allow for increased encouragement of precisely the unsustainable, monocultural and intensive agriculture that we are trying to move away from, buoyed up by the boom and bust cycle of an unordered market. That benefits the processor in the short term, but not in the long term. There is a vicious circle: the unordered market increases acreage, thereby increasing pollution and possibly ruining productive land. By encouraging this monoculture, we are shooting ourselves in the foot, as our growers are caught up in a spiralling risk of crop and/or market failure.

An unordered market leads to an increase in acreage devoted to potatoes, an increase in pesticide and fertiliser use, an increase in processor power over UK growers, and an increase in farmers' vulnerability. We need to be sustainable; we need to be fair. We must not cut farmers adrift and leave them in a sea of market distortion. Other EU countries are allowed to subsidise their potato production.

We are becoming increasingly sceptical of subsidising over-production and waste. Labour policy seeks to redirect regulation to encourage good, not bad, practice. Regulation under a light regime could allow us to move toward sustainable and efficient practices. The NFU is absolutely right in its reasonable desire to compete on even terms with our EU counterparts. We have heard a lot about level playing fields; perhaps we should refer to level potato fields for a change. Secondly, the NFU wants common rules governing competition—for example, not allowing other member states to provide state aid for their producers while British growers cannot enjoy similar support.

Thirdly, funding—if the Government are to go ahead with this daft idea—must be provided for winding up. Such transition funds should be used to smooth the path of farmers and producers alike towards a lightweight EU-wide regime.

The stakeholders have contributed to the potato marketing scheme, so it would only be right and proper for the Government to foot the bill for the producers, who do not want the change in the first place. The Government have expelled a lot of hot air about all the things they have done in the past six weeks. They have had three years to consider the matter, but are acting only now because they cannot think of anything better to do. They are panicking as they realise that they have not done enough work. Tory Members with rural constituencies know that, as some of their interventions—not their speeches—have shown.

The NFU and the Potato Marketing Board are wondering why the Minister does not implement his party's policy, as stated in the Committee quotation from 4 May 1993 read by the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler). What has changed since then? Nothing—or nothing in Europe, anyway. This is just another doctrinaire policy, based on ideology and not on common sense.

10.54 pm

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): May I say one or two words, and perhaps ask a couple of questions of the Minister? My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding), who spoke from the Opposition Front Bench, and the Liberal spokesman, the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), raised an important issue in this debate, which is that, in Standing Committee on the Agriculture Bill, Ministers gave us clear assurances about what would happen in certain conditions. We sought those assurances because the industry—in the form of the National Farmers

[Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours]

Union—and potato producers wanted to establish what Government policy would be in the event of difficulties in the marketplace.

I sensed that the Minister had not considered the speech made by his right hon. Friend the then Minister in Committee when he spoke tonight. My first question—perhaps the Minister can give us a clear answer—is, did he read that speech, and does he believe that he has met the undertakings given to Parliament in 1993?

Secondly, to what extent does the Minister have complete access to all Commission reports on state aids to the potato processing industry and potato producers throughout the European Community? Can he give us an assurance that he has an unfettered right to all the reports that the Commission produces?

If the Minister intends to take the British potato producers into a free market without undertakings on subsidy—to which the hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) and I object anyway—surely he must have some mechanism for being made fully aware of what subsidies are being paid within the Community, so that, when they are being paid, he can immediately raise the matter with the Commission with a view to those national aids being removed.

Finally, the scheme was devised in such a way as to reduce the potential for volatility in price. As I understand it, the mechanics of the scheme are such that potato producers take decisions on what to plant in any particular year within a quota system and target areas, and are guided not to over-produce. They have to guess to what extent they would be prepared to plant up to quota. If I remember rightly, some research done by Nottingham university in 1992 proved that there would be considerable price volatility in the market if the scheme were removed.

If that is the case, what will happen in the event that, let us say for two or three years in succession, there is a glut in the United Kingdom potato market? In those conditions, growers will totally lose confidence. Having lost money in successive years, they will worry and wonder whether it is worth their while planting potatoes in a third year, not knowing what the price is likely to be and not being able to assure their bank managers, who may well be lending them money, what will happen to their loan repayments.

As a consequence, we may be faced in one, two or three years with a sudden drop in the area planted in the United Kingdom, and a scarcity in the marketplace on an unparalleled scale, which might well lead to the importing of potatoes.

I wonder what will happen—

Mr. Bellingham: They will put up the price of soup.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The hon. Gentleman should know. The plant in his constituency is taking jobs from mine in two months' time. I cannot say that I would look favourably on anything that would help Campbell's Soups at the moment.

What will happen if there is a total loss of confidence in the marketplace? I have great reservations; I know that it is an argument of the past, but without the scheme, so as far as there is a potential for a loss of confidence, Parliament needs some reassurance as to what the Government's actions might be.

11 pm

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): I shall detain the House only briefly. I have a simple political philosophy: if it ain't broke, don't fix it. Cheshire farmers and growers believe strongly that the Potato Marketing Board has not only served them well by ironing out the peaks and troughs of production, but has served the consumer well. The reforms—the removal of quotas and so on—have benefited growers, processors and consumers.

My only worry is that, after we have got rid of the potato marketing scheme, the industry may face unfair competition from our partners in Europe. Surely we are not so naive that we do not remember examples in the past, when we played the game as it should be played and removed subsidies, and other countries used subsidies from their national Governments to undermine our success.

I hope that when my hon. Friend the Minister replies to the debate, he will reassure hon. Members on both sides of the House who share my concern that he would consider using his powers to extend the revocation period, and that he will tell the House that if at the time—that is, in June 1997—he found that the market conditions within Europe were unfair, he would then seek to act on behalf of not only British growers, but British consumers.

11.1 pm

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): It is extremely unusual for East Lothian and Congleton to be in agreement, but that is the case tonight. I represent some hundreds of potato producers in East Lothian. I also represent 68,000 potato consumers. It is surprising that more has not been said about the interests of consumers, who are also important.

I hope that the Minister will acknowledge that for many years the Potato Marketing Board has served the interests of consumers and producers very well. It is a complicated commodity and matters could become difficult for producers and consumers. Over a long period of years, the board has ensured a reasonable balance between supply and demand. I share the concern of my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) that if we do away with the quotas and regulations, as the Minister is doing tonight, in a future year there could be a glut, the price could collapse and there could be a serious shortage in the following year. That would be bad news for all concerned in the United Kingdom, and our neighbours in mainland Europe would certainly take advantage of that. That brings me to state aid to industry on mainland Europe. I am anxious that today we are doing away with one scheme and creating a vacuum that could be completely against the interests of our producers and consumers.

Various Conservative Members have said that the Government should pay careful attention to state aid on mainland Europe and should be ready to take vigorous action. What on earth does that mean? Will the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food go round auditing the accounts of potato producers and processors in every nook and cranny of mainland Europe? Obviously the

Commission will not do so, unless there is the regime that we want to see. It is likely that unfair competition will develop. It would be a serious error to tear up what is left of the scheme in the absence of something better in its place. It is grotesquely irresponsible of the Minister to be leading the industry and consumers up the creek without a paddle as a result of the debate.

11.4 pm

Mr. Boswell: With the leave of the House, I shall reply to the interesting points made in the debate. The hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) made the most revealing speech of many in a revealing and useful debate. The totem that she enunciated, in which she was apparently joined in unity by the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson), was that we should not destroy that which we have. If that is new Labour, it is an interesting gloss on new Labour. I was disappointed that the hon. Lady, in her somewhat limited remarks, was not able to define—and no other Opposition Member could—the position of stakeholders. The hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) characteristically identified himself solely with producer interests. Conservative Members firmly believe in the interests of producers and consumers, who will be favoured by the proposed deregulation.

Only through the House passing the revocation order will the Potato Marketing Board be free to implement its plans to bring forward agreed proposals for a successor body. That is the way forward for the industry, rather than staying as it is.

The hon. Lady and other hon. Members did not seem to reflect the correct economic context. The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) mentioned the current state of exports and imports, particularly in relation to processing. My hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) referred to the familiar fact that a high proportion of our imports are for processing—an area where we have tended to lose market share over the years. It is significant that since our announcement more than two years ago on winding up the scheme, processors have committed themselves to £50 million of additional investment in this country, which supposes that they will obtain supplies and that it will be economic to source from British producers.

There was a degree of obsession with activities in Europe, both as to state aids and the economic regime for the countries involved. It is clear that the most successful countries—in certain cases, those that want no regime—are those that do not subsidise their growers and emphasise the importance of being able to produce for the market.

As to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet, I much welcomed his robust attitude to the principle of subsidy and control and his general remarks about state aids, which struck a chord with me. I understand his concern and that of the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) regarding the special conditions for early potatoes. Occasionally, as is bound to happen with any commodity market, there is some instability where there is a high emphasis on the seasonal premium. As we move into a single market, the logic is that it should not readily be possible to dump, because it is open to our producers to export into markets offering a higher price. That is exemplified by recent experience.

There is no universal or general experience of damage to our growers from the prevalent practice of state aids in other member states being applied in such a way as to distort competition.

Mr. Ainger: Why did the then Minister, now Secretary of State for the Environment, go to such great lengths in Standing Committee to make a series of commitments in relation to state aids in Europe? Can the Minister answer that?

Mr. Boswell: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister, who normally attends the Council, is tireless in pursuing those matters and in pressing the Commission and his colleagues to obtain a regime that will enable us to go forward.

There is no significant evidence at this stage—if there is, perhaps hon. Members will send it to me—of damage caused to the British potato industry by the imports to which reference has been made. They cause nothing like the damage that is done by the industry being held back by outmoded modes of regulation. I say to those who have argued in favour of the maintenance of the scheme—they are apparently in favour of quotas—that merely maintaining it, when the board has taken the decision to lift quotas, would not by itself produce that which they want.

It is interesting that my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) made it clear that in reality there is no systematic or serious opposition to our proposals. There are concerns, of course, and there is acknowledgement of the board's role in the past and of some of its achievements. That I readily acknowledge, but there is no systematic wish to continue with the practices of the past.

An issue that does not strictly arise from the order—it was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives—is brown rot, which is apparent in Dutch seed potatoes. The Commission, on the advice of the Plant Health Committee, has taken action. We supplemented that with our own agreed national action. We take the matter seriously. We are determined to protect the British potato industry and our seed stocks. As a result of our testing programme, one lot of seed imported from the Netherlands has been identified with a case of brown rot. The matter has been reported to me within the past 24 hours. Under current legislation, we have the ability to control that seed. It cannot be planted without our permission. We have notified the Dutch authorities and the Commission, which will be considering the matter again in the Plant Health Committee next week. We shall continue to pursue our testing regime and to control all imports from the Dutch source.

I return to the general points. What is the regime that is desirable for the potato industry? Whatever the merits of a lightweight regime, which we shall continue to press vigorously in Europe, there is no advantage in holding up the revocation of the scheme to secure such a regime. The consequences of the present scheme and the inhibitions and costs that it has imposed and incurred are greater than any advantages that it offers the British grower or consumer. It would be desirable to secure a lightweight regime, but the two matters are separate. It is time to move on.

The emphasis of the existing regulations, which have their genesis in the thinking of two generations ago, is bureaucracy and restriction. The board and the industry

[Mr. Boswell]

are ready and waiting for change. We will not reintroduce quotas and control. We believe that there should be the earliest possible action and that the right way to take that action is to pass the order that I have commended to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 193, Noes 161.

Division No. 29] **[11.13 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cartiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Farnham)*
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Bowen Wells and
Mr. Patrick McLoughlin.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cummings, John
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*

Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Ilsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jamieson, David
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wise, Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Joe Benton and
Mr. Eric Martlew.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Potato Marketing Scheme (Commencement of Revocation Period) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 12th December, be approved.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Financial Services

That the Financial Services Act 1986 (Investment Services) (Extension of Scope of Act) Order 1995 (S. I., 1995, No. 3271), dated 18th December 1995, a copy of which was laid before this House on 18th December, be approved.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

Question agreed to.

LIAISON

Ordered,

That Mr. Richard Caborn and Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith be discharged from the Liaison Committee and Mr. Martin O'Neill and Mr. Giles Radice be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

Campions Wood

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

11.25 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I suppose I should begin by apologising to the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford), for keeping him up so late. As some small consolation, I should tell him that the first time I had an Adjournment debate in the early 1970s, it came on at about 4 am. At least this is a comparatively civilised hour.

It is almost 40 years since the problem that I wish to raise began, because it was on 13 November 1956 that permission to extract clay and associated materials from a 65 acre site in fields on the edge of the mining village of Cheslyn Hay was granted. That site came to be known as the Campions Wood site, hence the title of the debate.

In 1970, shortly before I was elected to the House to represent that village and the rest of my then constituency of Cannock, the Minister of Housing and Local Government—who, if my memory serves me correctly, was the late Anthony Greenwood—on the recommendation of an inspector gave planning permission on appeal for a housing development right up to the boundary of this land after Cannock district council had refused planning permission.

The developer soon began to build his houses, and nice houses they were. It seems that the original owners moved in in ignorance of the earlier planning permission, and it does not seem to have been found in the searches that were conducted by their solicitors. There was no real problem until 1993. There had been some small-scale excavations that the county council was told by its legal advisers were probably of a sufficient scale to maintain the permission.

In 1993, prospecting began in earnest and one week in July 1995 operations began and a great bund some 6 m high was constructed less than 5 m from the gardens of my constituents. The House can imagine the appalling problems that they have faced as a result. I have been inundated with letters over the past six months or so, a great many of which have been received on my fax machine over the past 24 to 48 hours since it became widely known that I had secured this debate. I shall not quote from all of them but will quote merely from one that lists the problems that are faced by a constituent and his neighbours.

The letter states that there is no respite from noise or dirt, that windows can no longer be opened for any length of time, that houses and cars are continually covered by dust and dirt, that the immediate environment has been ruined and that there is severe blight on properties. Obviously, people wish to sell their houses to get away from that ravaged environment, but nobody wants to buy the houses. Residents are worried by the potential for accidents created by the enormous pit that is opening just behind their garden fences. It is

"an accident waiting to happen",

as my constituent says in his letter. The mud must be seen to be believed. The aspect to the village from the south has been ruined. The whole village has been blighted.

Residents believe, and I understand why, that only an end to the quarrying and subsequent landscaping can make the site acceptable. *[Interruption.]* I am relieved that my hon. Friends have finished their conversation. Residents have appealed to the county council to exercise its powers. It has begun negotiations, but it feels that it is in a dilemma. After all, it can in no sense be blamed for what has happened, which I accept.

The council has asked me therefore to appeal, just as my constituents have, to my hon. Friend the Minister. Over the past few months, he and I have exchanged a number of letters. He has referred me to the Environment Act 1995, which requires planning authorities to review planning permissions. This site does fall in the first category to be reviewed, but, even if the council lists it by the end of this month, the earliest that it can require the operator to submit to any new scheme of conditions is 1 February 1997. Even then, any conditions imposed on the site should not, I am told, prejudice to an unreasonable degree either the economic viability of the site or processing operation, or the asset value. There is no certainty therefore that, even if they take that route, my constituents will be relieved. It is certain that they will not be relieved for at least another year, even if everything falls into place.

The district council is powerless because it has no jurisdiction in the matter. The county council is unwilling immediately to revoke permission because of the liability for compensation, which is understandable. It is pursuing an alternative of negotiating, but the owner, Dr. Roberts, is often at sea—he is a medical doctor and serves, I believe, on a Cunard ship. It is difficult to contact him or his representatives. A third party, I understand, has now bought a portion of the site and it has been difficult to trace that party.

I asked my hon. Friend the Minister whether he would be willing to receive a delegation from the county council. He said that it might prejudice the Secretary of State's discretion in the event of any appeal, so he could not do so. Meanwhile, my constituents continue to suffer—the blight continues. All the appalling consequences of the quarrying—to which I referred when I quoted the letter—persist.

In these circumstances, and bearing it in mind that the houses are there only because a previous Minister who was not in this Government or even in the Conservative party granted permission, there is a moral obligation on the Government. I understand the constraints to which my hon. Friend referred in his correspondence. For the reasons to which I have alluded, this is in no sense a criticism of him or of the Government; it is a plea on behalf of some hard-pressed constituents. The debate is, I venture to suggest, a classic illustration of the worth of Adjournment debates, where a Member of Parliament can bring such concerns to the Floor of the House.

I should like to make two suggestions to my hon. Friend. I hope that he will either allow me to bring a group of residents to see him so that he can discuss with them their fears and worries and try to find a way forward or, better still, convene a meeting, to which representatives of the county council, the developer and residents would be invited with me, to discuss a way forward.

A way forward must be found. We cannot allow the lives of those people to be blighted in this way. We cannot allow children to grow up in the appalling atmosphere of

dust, dirt and danger. The quarrying could continue for another decade, well into the next century. Children could grow up never knowing anything other than a large bund at the end of the garden with an enormous hole beyond that, with all the attendant dirt, dust and danger. When the quarrying ends, what will happen about filling in the hole?

There is a problem and it must be tackled. I appeal to my hon. Friend to use his well-known sympathy and considerable ingenuity to help me to find a way forward.

11.35 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): I congratulate—rather than thank—my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) on landing this problem on my plate at this hour. As he said, perhaps I should be thankful that it is not 4 o'clock in the morning.

My hon. Friend has raised a considerable problem. The Government have recognised both it and the passions and concerns that it has aroused. That is why we responded significantly with primary legislation. He is aware that we have reformed the old quarry permissions and that considerable progress has been made. The Environment Act 1995 has given the local planning authority wide environmental powers. He knows that I cannot refer to the details of the case in question, but the planning authority has the power to impose environmental constraints upon working sites.

As my hon. Friend said, 31 January is the date by which the list of sites must be published and I expect the site in question to be included. An application must be made for new conditions and a date must be specified. I shall check whether it is possible for that date to be brought forward from 1 February next year, which was suggested by my hon. Friend.

In essence, my hon. Friend made one suggestion—that I act as a negotiator. I listened carefully, but I do not know whether he means between all sides.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I made two suggestions—first, that my hon. Friend should allow me to bring a deputation of residents to meet him, and secondly—this is preferable—that he convenes a meeting with representatives of the county, the developer and residents, accompanied by me, to try to find a way forward.

Sir Paul Beresford: I thank my hon. Friend for that clarification. He is aware that his first suggestion is not really an option. It could cause a problem if there were an appeal because I, as a representative of the Department and the Government, would have listened to only one side of the argument. After this debate, I shall reflect on his second suggestion. Although it appears to be fraught with difficulty, it has possibilities.

The best way to proceed is for the county council to review the permission under the new legislation. It is an opportunity to ensure that it conforms to modern conditions. It would involve neither revocation nor payment of compensation. It would remove many of the difficulties, such as dirt and noise, referred to by my hon. Friend.

As my hon. Friend suggested in some of the correspondence, it would be possible for Staffordshire county council to revoke the permission. If it did that, it would have to pay compensation, as my hon. Friend said. He suggested that the Secretary of State should revoke the permission. That could happen only in absolutely exceptional circumstances, and I fail at this stage to consider the circumstances of this case exceptional. Even if the circumstances were exceptional sufficiently for the Secretary of State to revoke the permission, the county council would still have to bear the compensation by law. There is no choice.

Sir Patrick Cormack: If that is, indeed, the case and if the other avenues that I have suggested came to a dead end, my hon. Friend and the Secretary of State would lose nothing by treating the case as exceptional—as it properly is—and revoking the permission.

Sir Paul Beresford: I am afraid that I disagree with my hon. Friend. I do not think that the case is exceptional. There are such cases up and down the country that have been carefully considered. That is why the Government required in the Environment Act 1995 an updating of the environmental conditions for the working of quarries.

I shall however take away the two points that my hon. Friend has made and consider them again. First, I shall see whether there is any way in which the date may be moved forward. Secondly, I shall consider whether there is any way in which some form of arbitration and negotiation between the various parties can be initiated in order to find mutually agreed, environmentally acceptable conditions, which will help the people and at the same time allow the quarry to be worked.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at nineteen minutes to Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Thursday 18 January 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *[Lords]*

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Promoters of the City of Westminster Bill *[Lords]* may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the Bill in the present Session; and the Petition for the Bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable thereto shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That if the Bill is brought from the Lords in the present Session, the Agents for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration signed by them stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the Lords in the last Session;

That, as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be read the first and second time and committed (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read and committed) and shall be committed to the Chairman of Ways and Means, who shall make such Amendments thereto as were made by him in the last Session, and shall report the Bill as amended to the House forthwith, and the Bill, so amended, shall be ordered to lie upon the Table;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during any previous Session.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered on Thursday 25 January.

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

Deaths in Custody

1. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people died in official custody in 1995. [7842]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Miss Ann Widdecombe): For deaths in police custody or otherwise with the police, the provisional figure for 1995 is 52. For deaths in prison custody, the figure is 117, which includes 60 self-inflicted deaths.

Mr. Cohen: Do not these deaths shame Britain? Are not the Government, by doing nothing about them, supplying a blue touchpaper for future riots? Is it not shameful that families cannot get to see their deceased loved ones and are denied information on how they died? Should not the Government accept the Police Complaints Authority's recommendations that neck choke-holds should be banned, that public interest immunity—it is misused so that even coroners cannot obtain information—should be reformed or changed and that there should be a public inquiry into these deaths, which involve, especially, many young black men?

Miss Widdecombe: In any death in police custody an inquest is held, which should bring about inquiries and satisfy the queries to which the hon. Gentleman alluded. With deaths in prison, the most serious concern is suicide. There is a suicide strategy now, which is implemented throughout the Prison Service.

Dame Jill Knight: Does my hon. Friend recall a report some time ago from the Select Committee on Home Affairs which investigated deaths in police custody? It was discovered, by listening to the evidence, that a large proportion of the prison population was made up of people who had already abused their bodies, which meant that their health was not the same as that of people outside. They were drug takers, drunks and tramps. It was felt unreasonable to fail to take that into consideration when examining death figures.

Miss Widdecombe: It is true both of those who die in police custody and of those who die in prison that there is a clear link in many cases, although clearly not in all, of abuse of substances, of alcohol and of drugs. My hon. Friend is right. Before we jump to any conclusions, we should study the figures, examine the situation and investigate the causes. That produces a rather different picture from that painted by the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), who tabled the main question.

Burglaries

2. **Mr. Timms:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the change in recorded offences of burglary in London during the 12-month period to June 1995; and what comparisons he has made with the national change over the same period. [7843]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): The number of burglaries recorded for the whole of England and Wales for the year to June 1995 shows a fall of 5 per cent. compared with the previous 12 months. The statistics for the Metropolitan police district, which were affected by significant changes to the recording criteria, indicate an increase of 6 per cent. over the same period.

Mr. Timms: I thank the Home Secretary for that answer. He has confirmed that, at a time when there was a welcome fall in the level of burglary throughout the country generally, there appears still to have been an increase in London. What proposals does he have to tackle the rise in burglary in London? Why is it that, despite the promises that there will be extra police officers, there are 400 fewer in London now than there were in 1992?

Mr. Howard: The rise in the figures is explained by the recording criteria, as I have said. I am astonished that the hon. Gentleman did not refer to the fact that, in the Forest Gate and Plaistow divisions of the Metropolitan

police—both areas are in his constituency—recorded burglaries fell by nearly 8 per cent. in the 12 months to October 1995 compared with the previous 12-month period. Burglary clear-ups in those divisions rose by 28 per cent. There are now 21,600 constables in the Metropolitan police, more than ever before, and 5,000 more than in 1979.

Dr. Hampson: Does my right hon. and learned Friend recognise that these much-improved figures are achieved at a price and that officers on the beat increasingly have to put their lives at risk? With four assaults on West Yorkshire officers in one recent weekend, the chief constable of West Yorkshire is keen to run a trial of CS incapacitants in the centre of Leeds at the Millgarth station. Will my right hon. and learned Friend agree, as a matter of some urgency, to a trial period for incapacitants and make their use appropriate for each force?

Mr. Howard: I made it clear some time ago that I was keen for the trials to commence. The relevant committee of the Association of Chief Police Officers is meeting today to discuss the matter, and I very much hope that it will agree to proceed with the trials.

Probation Training

3. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the future of probation training. [7848]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Tom Sackville): Probation officers are no longer required to hold a social work qualification. We are now working with the probation service to put in place new arrangements for their training, which my right hon. and learned Friend announced on 2 October.

Mr. Williams: What is the Government's reaction to the debate in the other place of 5 December, in which the Government were defeated and in which 14 successive participants spoke strongly of the continuing need for a higher education professional qualification for probation officers?

Mr. Sackville: I might well ask the hon. Gentleman what is his reaction to the debate in Committee on the same subject, which the Government won overwhelmingly and in which I made it very clear that we intended to put in place a broad-based programme of education instead of a social work degree. We believe that having only a social work qualification is a disincentive and that it does not give the probation service the broad-based education that it needs.

Sir Michael Spicer: Does my hon. Friend agree that, by changing the entry terms, we will be able to attract more mature people into the service? Most particularly, I would instance high-calibre ex-service men and women.

Mr. Sackville: If I may, I shall agree with my hon. Friend by illustration: if someone comes along who has been in some voluntary organisation that deals with young people, or, indeed, has been in the armed services, and the probation service says, "Yes, you look very suitable, but you now have to do a two-year social work degree," I would regard that as a waste of many talented applicants.

Mr. Michael: Should not Conservative Members, who are among the group that might be without jobs and take advantage of this change, be declaring an interest today? Is the Home Secretary aware that probation officers deal with ever more damaged and dangerous individuals and that inadequate training will put probation officers and the public at risk? As the Home Secretary knows that Labour will support positive, constructive change in probation training, why is he afraid to put his proposals for change before the House in a statutory instrument?

Mr. Sackville: If the hon. Gentleman wants to do something constructive and serious about this matter, he might note that, next week, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, representatives of the profession and my right hon. Friend Lady Blatch will meet to discuss it. It is certainly nothing to do with the Government that negotiations have not taken place before. I suggest that it has a great deal to do with the Opposition's attitude.

Asylum Seekers

4. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the latest estimate of the numbers seeking asylum in 1995. [7849]

Miss Widdecombe: Our latest estimate of the number of asylum applications in 1995 is 43,963.

Mr. Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that if the rate of increase demonstrated by those figures were to continue, in a five-year Parliament no fewer than 300,000 people would apply for asylum in this country? Does that not demonstrate the need for the Asylum and Immigration Bill and show that it is incumbent on those who oppose the Bill to say whether they find that figure acceptable?

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Opposition have continually condemned the Bill but have not put forward a single viable alternative. In effect, they are saying that we should allow the number of applications to continue to rise, that we should not distinguish between applications, whether genuine or bogus, and that we should just ignore and run away from the problem. That is the Opposition's position. That means that they do not take seriously the worries and anxieties of the British people. They do not take seriously the plight of the genuine asylum seeker who is suffering in a clogged-up system.

Mr. Henderson: Why will the hon. Lady not listen to Church and community leaders in Britain who on many occasions have pointed out to her the damage that they believe the Asylum and Immigration Bill will cause to race and community relations? Why will she not listen to her hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle), a previous Home Office Minister, who has made it clear to her that the only proper, fair and effective way to cut the lists of people waiting is to have a more efficient system and to apply the resources necessary to achieve that?

Miss Widdecombe: The biggest danger to race relations is the sort of alarmism stirred by the Opposition, who quite deliberately seek to exploit fear on the issue. We have now put in £37 million over three years for extra asylum caseworkers, we have decided 26,000 claims in the past 12 months—a 27 per cent. increase on the previous 12 months and double that in 1993—and the number of asylum staff has increased from 100 in 1988 to 700 now. That is the reality of putting in more resources. But unless we control the flow of bogus claims, more and more resources will be required, and that is not a sensible use of public funds. I cannot work out why, when the Leader of the Opposition talks about not wanting to tax in order to spend more, the Opposition want the Government to go on spending and spending on unfounded and undeserving cases.

Mr. Waterson: Can my hon. Friend confirm that some 70 per cent. of asylum seekers enter Britain as students, tourists or business men? Does that not give the lie to some of the comments of Opposition Members? Does it not also suggest that most asylum seekers do not come to Britain in genuine fear of persecution but that, once here, they decide that it is quite a nice place to stay?

Miss Widdecombe: It is clear from the small percentage of asylum seekers who are found to be in genuine need of a place of asylum—only 4 per cent. of claims and another 4 per cent. on appeal—that the vast majority of cases have no foundation. My hon. Friend is right to identify the number of people who use asylum simply to stave off removal when they have exhausted every last avenue. That is not what asylum is about, or what the Geneva convention is about. Britain has a long and honourable tradition of being a place of safety for genuine applicants. I want to help genuine applicants and that means relieving the system of the bogus ones.

Crime

5. **Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in which police force region in England and Wales there has been the lowest increase in recorded crime since 1979. [7851]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): Since 1979, Merseyside has had the lowest increase in recorded crime, with 34 per cent. I congratulate Merseyside police and all other forces on their commitment in tackling crime.

Mr. Milburn: Is it not a terrible admission that every police force area in Britain has seen record increases in crime since 1979—a doubling across the country as a whole? Is it not also the case that, even if current reductions in crime continue, it will be another 15 years before we return to the levels of 1979? Do not the Home Office figures simply prove that under this Government Britain is less safe?

Mr. Maclean: Sensibly, I took the precaution of checking the previous Labour Government's record. The hon. Gentleman tries to pretend that crime was invented or started to rise only in 1979. Crime rose considerably under the previous Labour Government. The one thing that fell was the number of police officers. When the Labour party left office, the police were 8,000 under strength, and they left behind a demoralised and debilitated police force. That was the task that we had to tackle when we came to office. The hon. Gentleman should also give credence to the fact that police forces throughout Britain are now getting on top of crime and that for the past two years crime has been falling, not least in Durham, which includes his constituency.

Mr. John Greenway: My right hon. Friend is right to point to the police service's low morale in the 1970s under the last Labour Government and to the fact that, under this Government, police numbers have risen, but is it not the case that rural parts of Britain are not experiencing the fall in crime that has occurred in inner cities? Will he ensure that, in the arrangement involving the 5,000 extra officers that the Prime Minister has promised, extra officers will be deployed in rural areas, where the need is now greatest?

Mr. Maclean: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the fact that, since 1979, we have recruited an extra 16,000 bobbies, and an extra 16,000 police civilians to free up more bobbies to go on the beat, but I caution him on this point: crime in rural areas is falling, as it is falling in the cities. If my hon. Friend considers the crime figures, he will find that crime is falling in rural counties, too. Crime there has risen much less than in cities. Despite what many of our constituents say, rural areas are largely low in crime, compared with some inner cities.

In the funding formula this year, we have ensured not just that every force in the country will receive a generous increase but that every force can recruit more officers if it wishes to do so. I am sure that chief constables will want to ensure that all parts of their patch have adequate police cover.

Mr. Straw: When the Minister referred to the last Labour Government's record compared with that of this Conservative Administration, why did he not admit that the rate of increase of crime under the Conservative Administration has been twice as fast, year by year, as under the last Labour Government? It is the worst record of any post-war Government, and of any of the 16 countries surveyed by the Home Office. Does that not show that the Conservative party can be no more trusted on law and order than it can be trusted to keep its promises on tax?

Mr. Maclean: I do not say that, because it is simply not the case. The hon. Gentleman likes to take up his international survey, but he likes to stop at 1993. He does not like to go on to the latest figures, which show that crime in this country has been falling faster than in other European countries.

As for the hon. Gentleman criticising our record on law and order, I go back to my point about this country's police service. He and his hon. Friends like to nitpick about the number of bobbies at present, about dozens of officers here and about 50 officers there, but the last Labour Government left us 8,000 police under strength and with a police force that was heading downhill, under a Labour Government going downhill. Our police are now 16,000 stronger. They are getting the technology, they have high-quality officers and they are beating crime, and the Opposition do not like to know it. They like to get bad news stories. That is a disgrace to the police service.

Sir John Cope: While we are on international comparisons, is my hon. right Friend aware that there are about 18 times as many murders in Washington as there are in the Avon and Somerset police force area? Is it therefore not disgraceful that the State Department should be saying to American tourists that Bristol is not a safe city? It is a jolly sight safer than anywhere in the United States, including Washington.

Mr. Maclean: I should like to see the statement to which my right hon. Friend refers, because it is the sort of thing that I may to wish to take up with our American friends. It is not just that Bristol and Avon are safer than Washington. Crime is falling in large parts of this country and in most police forces. Not just in Avon and Somerset but throughout this country, we have safe communities, to which we welcome all foreign tourists. My right hon. Friend is right to say that the serious homicide rate in the United States is on average 10 times higher than in the United Kingdom. No country is safer than this for our American friends to visit. They should get to the north of England and the Lake district, too.

Uniformed Police

6. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the Police Federation concerning the proposed increase in uniformed officers. [7582]

Mr. Howard: I discussed the proposed increase in the number of uniformed officers with the Police Federation at the time of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's announcement. The federation chairman described the announcement as a

"tremendous boost for the Service."

Mr. Sutcliffe: Federation members locally are concerned about the announcement of extra police. The Government are kidding no one but themselves if they think the fear of crime has improved. Crime is as bad now as it was, it is getting worse and ordinary people are suffering.

Police establishment figures were cancelled two years ago, and numbers were left to the discretion of chief constables. Is that because two years ago West Yorkshire had 5,295 officers, whereas it now has only 5,120? Where are these extra police officers?

Mr. Howard: The reason for the change is that it is what chief constables—including the chief constable of West Yorkshire—wanted. Since 1979, the number of police officers in West Yorkshire has increased by 383 and the number of civilians by 774, and West Yorkshire will receive enough funds to recruit 200 extra constables over the next three years. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will draw those figures to his constituents' attention.

Sir Donald Thompson: Notwithstanding the facts drawn to our attention by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson), does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that morale among the well-led police in West Yorkshire is as high as it has been for many years? My constituents like to see uniformed police about. Will my right hon. and learned Friend continue to get them away from their desks and on duty?

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. It is largely a result of that morale, or associated with it, that the last crime figures that I saw for West Yorkshire showed a 5.5 per cent. reduction over the 12 months in question: 16,000 fewer crimes had been committed in the area.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Does the Home Secretary recall that, in the 1992 Conservative manifesto, his party promised to provide 1,000 extra police officers in that year? Does he further recall that only 771 were appointed, and is he aware that since then the number has been reduced by 1,333? That information is based on Government statistics that I was given recently in a parliamentary answer.

What reason do the people of Greater London, Greater Manchester, Wales, Avon and Somerset, West Mercia and other areas that have experienced a reduction in the number of police officers since 1993 have to trust the Government's current promises any more than they should have trusted the broken promises of 1992?

Mr. Howard: I do not for a moment accept the figures given by the hon. and learned Gentleman. This year alone, we expect to have an extra 400 officers across the country, and, as a result of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's announcement, we shall have an extra 5,000 over the next three years. As for the Metropolitan police, to which the hon. and learned Gentleman specifically referred, as I said earlier this afternoon there are now 21,600 constables in the Met—more than ever before, and 5,000 more than there were in 1979.

Mr. Matthew Banks: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, contrary to the misleading impression created by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), he has ensured that next year alone chief constables throughout the country will be able to create up to 1,000 new posts for bobbies on the beat?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The money has been provided, following agreement with the Association of Chief Police Officers, and I hope very much that chief constables will recruit the extra officers.

Closed Circuit Television

7. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce the allocation of the money announced in the Budget for closed circuit television. [7853]

Mr. Maclean: Fifteen million pounds will be distributed in 1996-97 by means of a challenge competition. Bids for funding are to be received in the Home Office by 29 March 1996. My right hon. and learned Friend hopes to announce the results early in the summer.

Mr. Rendel: In providing the second tranche of money for closed circuit television, will the Home Secretary give special consideration to district councils that were not given a slice of the first tranche but went ahead with their own schemes, paying for them with council tax money, and now wish to extend those schemes?

Mr. Maclean: No, I will not give special consideration to those councils; I will give equal and fair consideration

to all councils that may be considering add-on or bolt-on schemes to complement their existing systems. I appeal to councils, police forces, local businesses and partnerships to take advantage of the wonderful technology that is now at our disposal, prepare bids and present them before the end of March. All those bids will be judged objectively and fairly, and we hope to announce the winners by early summer.

Mr. Rowe: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the results of CCTV in Maidstone are absolutely first-class? Will he pay tribute to the borough council for its principled refusal to allow any of the material collected on those cameras to be sold or made use of for any other purpose?

Mr. Maclean: The Maidstone camera scheme is excellent, along with hundreds of others in the country. I agree with the council's stance; it is the Government's stance. We insist that any scheme which does not have a proper code of practice on how tapes are kept will not be given funding. I believe that the Association of Chief Police Officers has also come to that view with regard to any special film it may have of motorway incidents.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The Minister will know that the public want their taxes to be spent on reducing crime. Why not invest considerably more in CCTV since we all know that it works? Are not many communities in Cumbria, which contains the Minister's constituency, demanding that?

Mr. Maclean: The short answer is that we are investing considerably more. In CCTV technology alone, investment has gone from nothing two years ago, to £5 million last year, to £15 million in the coming year. There has also been investment in other police technology, such as the national automated fingerprint identification computer system and the Phoenix system. Investment in the police service alone has doubled in real terms since the Conservative party came to office and stands at £5.5 billion. That is investment in cutting crime and a successful police service, which is backed up by the best technology in the world.

Corporal Punishment

8. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for reintroducing corporal punishment; and if he will make a statement. [7854]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope): We have no such plans. I am afraid that we are not satisfied that corporal punishment would be useful in practice.

Mr. Bellingham: Is my hon. Friend aware that many people who were previously opposed to corporal punishment, including Members of Parliament such as me, are appalled at the growing number of crimes committed against elderly people? Is he aware that, in my constituency, a residential home was recently broken into by a young thug? Not content with burgling an old lady of 90, he beat her up. Is it not time that such wicked criminals were given a taste of their own medicine? Will my hon. Friend undertake to set up an inquiry or a commission to investigate whether corporal punishment would be a deterrent and make our streets and communities safer?

Mr. Kirkhope: I think that we are all sickened to hear the example of gratuitous and sadistic violence to which my hon. Friend referred. I know that he will want to support the Government in their determination to curb such crime. I am sure that he will want to support the proposals that we are bringing forward in our White Paper, such as automatic life sentences for two serious examples of violent crime. It is in that way that we will be able to curb such disgraceful crimes.

Vehicle Crime

9. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on the level of vehicle crime (a) in England and Wales and (b) in other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. [7855]

Mr. Maclean: Recorded vehicle crime fell by 9 per cent. in England and Wales in the 12 months to June 1995. The 1994 volume of criminal statistics contains international comparisons with several OECD countries and shows that in 1994, the 11 per cent. fall in recorded offences of theft of a vehicle in England and Wales was the highest of all the countries listed.

Mr. Cox: I note and indeed welcome that reply, as I am sure will hon. Members on both sides of the House. Is the Minister not aware that there is still an enormous amount of vehicle crime in England and Wales? We see evidence of it in our newspapers day by day, be they national or local newspapers. Did the Minister see the programme on television last week about Greater Manchester, where vehicle crime is so organised that cars are stolen on order for Australia? In view of that, what kind of interlinking system is there between police authorities so that there is a greater chance of stopping this on-going increase—in not only the vandalism of motors but, especially, the stealing of them?

Mr. Maclean: I cannot accept the last part of the hon. Gentleman's comment about "this on-going increase". Car crime has been among the largest categories of crime to fall over the past two years. In the past two years, car crime has fallen by 17 per cent. That is 270,000 fewer offences. Of course we are not complacent about that. Car crime is still too high and we will continue our efforts to cut it.

The Government's "Hyena Campaign" has been instrumental in cutting crime, as has the action taken by manufacturers and a host of police and Government initiatives. We shall continue such campaigns, which bear down on car crime.

The hon. Gentleman must not mislead himself, and accidentally mislead the House, by suggesting that car crime is increasing—in fact, it is falling considerably.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: I welcome the fall in car crime. However, as someone who had his car stolen from outside his house only the day before yesterday,

may I ask my right hon. Friend what action the motor manufacturers are taking to make the fitting of car alarms on every vehicle standard, and whether he feels that the insurance companies are offering sufficient discounts on insurance premiums for cars that are fitted in that way?

Mr. Maclean: I met yesterday the vehicle car crime prevention group, which is a sub-committee of the National Board for Crime Prevention, and we discussed that subject. It has been in the lead in persuading manufacturers to take car crime prevention seriously. We have now persuaded our EC partners and there will be a directive on car crime, dealing particularly with the fitting of immobilisers, and other car crime prevention measures. Those measures are making a difference, and they will continue to make a difference in reducing the rate of vehicle theft. We are now turning our attention to truck theft and theft of plant. If it is helpful to my hon. Friend, I will write him a letter which sets out the full details of what we are doing and place a copy of it in the Library of the House.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: If the Minister is not complacent about the issue of vehicle theft, will he accept that he certainly sounds as though he is? He has just had to admit that we have the highest vehicle crime rate of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. Will he acknowledge that, with the exception of Italy, we have the lowest stolen vehicle recovery rate of any country in Europe, and that, in regard to commercial vehicles, we have an astronomical problem? Will he stop coming to the House and denying that vehicle crime is a problem, and do something about it?

Mr. Maclean: No one is denying that it is a problem. We are taking the matter very seriously indeed. I resent the hon. Gentleman and others today poring through all the crime figures, trying to find statistics from some foreign country or some nugget of information that will enable them to paint a picture of bad news for Britain. Britain has historically had a higher rate of car crime than other countries, yet I do not hear Opposition Members talking about the much higher homicide rate in other EC countries or about their much higher rate of sexual offences. The Opposition like to pick out nuggets which they can use to criticise the success of the British police.

I would take the hon. Gentleman much more seriously if, in his question, he had mentioned that violent offences fell in this country by 2 per cent. last year, or that sexual offences, recorded rapes and overall crime fell, and that car crime also fell in the United Kingdom. We are not complacent, but we are not trying to cover up, as the hon. Gentleman is.

Border Controls

10. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in the European Court consideration of the border controls issue initiated by the European Parliament. [7856]

Mr. Howard: The oral hearing of the case, originally scheduled for 3 October 1995, has been postponed at the request of the European Parliament. No new date has been set.

Sir Teddy Taylor: As the case has meant the publication of three draft directives calling for total removal of border controls—details of which the Home Secretary has—and as it will mean that 18 million foreign nationals, including Algerians in France, Turks in Germany and many illegals, will have open access to the United Kingdom, would the Home Secretary, in the interests of good race relations and preserving our nation, make it abundantly clear that there is simply no way in which the Government would permit such a fundamental change to remove our border controls?

Mr. Howard: Yes. I have made it abundantly clear in the past, and I make it abundantly clear again, that we shall resist those directives, and we shall maintain our frontier controls.

Alcohol

11. **Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to make it an offence for young people under 18 years of age to consume alcohol in public places; and if he will make a statement. [7857]

Mr. Kirkhope: I share my hon. Friend's concern that we must do all that we can to discourage under-age drinking. My right hon. and learned Friend and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland are considering what further steps can be taken.

Mr. Gallie: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. May I point out to my hon. Friend that it is illegal for youngsters to purchase drink, it is illegal to sell them drink and it is illegal to buy drink for them? It seems ridiculous that youngsters can consume alcohol without breaking the law. Will my hon. Friend take that on board in his considerations?

Mr. Kirkhope: We shall certainly take those matters on board in our consideration. Let me mention something that I do not believe is widely known and remind the House that in England and Wales it is a statutory requirement for schools to educate pupils about alcohol misuse. Similar guidelines exist north of the border. Education plays an enormous part in curbing under-age drinking.

Mr. George Howarth: Is the Minister aware that, according to the Royal College of Physicians, more than a quarter of 14-year-old boys became violent after consuming alcohol? Does he agree that under-age drinkers often make public parks and shopping areas a nightmare for respectable citizens, who at best suffer from abuse, and in some cases are threatened with violence? Will the Minister monitor the schemes that have been introduced in Liverpool and Coventry and look at some of the experiments that have been conducted in the United States to see what further measures might be introduced to combat a serious and growing problem?

Mr. Kirkhope: I thank the hon. Gentleman. I am sure that we can take on board all the advice and experience that he relates as well as being vigilant in looking for ways of curbing the problem.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Is my hon. Friend aware of the excellent scheme that was on trial in Weymouth, where the police liaised with local television and radio stations to ask parents whether they knew where their children were on Friday and Saturday nights, when many youngsters drink alcohol in the streets? Will he consider making it an offence for an under-age person to be in possession of alcohol in the street and support such initiatives as the one that has worked so well in Weymouth?

Mr. Kirkhope: I compliment that partnership scheme with the local television station. Hon. Members may wish to suggest similar liaisons between the police and their regional television stations. We shall certainly take that experience on board and consider taking action in the way that my hon. Friend has suggested.

Robbery

12. **Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage change there has been in incidents of robbery as reported by the police in the 12 months to June 1995 in South Yorkshire. [7858]

Mr. Maclean: Recorded offences of robbery in South Yorkshire increased by 75 offences or 8 per cent. in the previous 12 months, although recorded crime overall fell by 2 per cent. in South Yorkshire.

Mr. Clapham: I thank the Minister for that reply. Is he aware that the incidence of robbery in the South Yorkshire police area has increased by 553 per cent. since 1979? That increase is 150 per cent. above the national average. What will he do about it and when will he take action to tackle robberies in South Yorkshire?

Mr. Maclean: It is rather pathetic for a Yorkshire Member of Parliament to attack his own police force. South Yorkshire police are in charge of crime in South Yorkshire. In the past year, they have been remarkably successful in reducing burglaries, vehicle crime and other crime. South Yorkshire police know that more needs to be done about robbery and it is an utter disgrace for the hon. Gentleman to come here and complain, without uttering a word of thanks for the excellent job that bobbies in South Yorkshire are doing.

Mrs. Peacock: My hon. Friend will be aware that violent crimes occurs not only in South Yorkshire but in West Yorkshire. Violent crime deserves strong punishment. As my hon. Friend told the House this afternoon that corporal punishment has no effect, can he explain why in the Isle of Man it is most rare for young people to be birched more than once?

Mr. Maclean: I do not have the figures for the Isle of Man, but, on robbery, we have seen in today's press the phenomenal success that Sir Paul Condon is having in London with his campaign against street robbery, cutting such crime by about 40 per cent. I am sure that chief constables throughout the rest of the country will have noted that, if one tackles a problem such as burglary, one gets it down, and if one tackles robbery, one gets it down. Sir Paul's success is to be applauded and copied elsewhere.

Prisons (Incentive Scheme)

13. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress on the implementation of the incentive scheme in prisons. [7860]

Miss Widdecombe: Ninety-one per cent. of establishments will have implemented the scheme by 1 February.

Mr. Greenway: Is it true that Full Sutton, near York, was the only prison in which there was any resistance to the introduction of the incentive scheme? Is it also true that those responsible for the disturbance have now been moved out and that the scheme is working well? Does my hon. Friend agree that early release from prison should be earned by good behaviour and should not be an automatic right?

Miss Widdecombe: The simple answers are yes, yes and yes. My hon. Friend has got every question absolutely right. The earned incentive scheme is a useful tool of control for prison officers. As such, it should be welcomed on both sides of the House and, as such, it is making a real contribution to promoting good order and discipline in our prisons.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Pearson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 18 January. [7875]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Pearson: In view of the renewed speculation about the right hon. Gentleman's leadership, can the Prime Minister tell the House what difference to his party or the country was made by his decision to precipitate a leadership contest last year?

The Prime Minister: We have this silly speculation almost every week in which there is a Thursday. It has been nonsense in the past and it is nonsense now.

Q2. **Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 18 January. [7876]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Gallie: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there are more shareholders today than trade unionists? Indeed,

many trade unionists are shareholders. Is he further aware of the Labour party's cynical plans to introduce shareholding for workers? Is not that a case of attempting to justify a tired and meaningless slogan?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is quite right about the growth in the number of shareholders and the fact that they now exceed the number of trade unionists.

Mr. Galloway: Resign.

The Prime Minister: Well, the trade unionists seem to have been doing that—that is one of the reasons why there are more shareholders than there are trade unionists. My hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) is equally right about the slogans from the Labour party. As the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) said last night:

"It is amusing that Labour's new slogan might be a long way round to rediscovering clause 4 and common ownership."

If the Labour party really believed in stakeholding and personal ownership, it would not have opposed every privatisation we have had—privatisations that have dramatically increased share ownership. The only stakeholders in their society would be the unions—Mr. Edmonds, Mr. Monks and their colleagues.

Mr. Blair: Can the Prime Minister confirm that, on the latest statistics, since 1989, when the Government changes to the health service were introduced, the number of nurses has fallen by 50,000 and the number of senior managers has risen by 18,000? Is not that a mistaken set of priorities for the health service?

The Prime Minister: The mistake is the misleading way in which the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) and now the right hon. Gentleman talk nonsense by distorting figures in the health service, as elsewhere. What the right hon. Gentleman clearly has not been advised about, or has chosen to ignore, is that there are more than 50,000 more nurses and 4,000 more midwives today than when the Government took office. They are providing effective health care close to where people live and work. Unlike the right hon. Gentleman, I take pride in the national health service and its achievements, and I very much regret that all that he and his colleagues can do is to take statistics, misuse statistics and try to run down the health service.

Mr. Blair: We take pride in the health service—we created the health service. We just do not like it being undermined by the Conservative party. The statistics that I quoted are from the Department of Health. The Prime Minister said that an extra 50,000 nurses had been created. Will he confirm that if one takes the full-time equivalent of nursing and compares like with like, there are fewer nurses now than there were in 1979? Furthermore, has not the decline happened entirely since 1989, when the changes were introduced? Does that not show that one is the consequence of the other and that there is a mistaken set of priorities in the health service?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is still distorting, and he overlooks the extra 1.5 million patients who are being treated. Patients statistics do not concern the Labour party. I will give the right hon. Gentleman a statistic that really shows what is happening in the health service—66 per cent. of health service staff are now involved in direct patient care, up from 60 per cent. only 12 years ago. That is because we have invested directly in front-line care and that is why more patients are being treated, and treated better and more speedily than ever before. I hope that, one day, the right hon. Gentleman will acknowledge the improvements in the health service, congratulate the people in the health service on making the improvements and acknowledge that we have repeatedly put more funds into the health service to enable those improvements to take place.

Mr. Blair: I notice that the Prime Minister did not dispute the statistics on nursing. If he wants an objective view, why does he not ask the doctors and nurses in the health service? Does he not understand that many people fear that money is being pumped into bureaucracy rather going to front-line nursing care, and that they are angry that the party that the Prime Minister calls a one-nation Conservative party is breaking the health service in two?

The Prime Minister: Yet again, the right hon. Gentleman distorts and twists reality to make his political point. If the right hon. Gentleman does not accept what I say, I advise him to listen to the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley), who told the Fabian Society,

"Labour's health policy will not look credible at the general election if we do not commit ourselves to matching the rate of growth delivered by the Conservatives."

Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will contemplate that. The truth is that his party has no health policy. Labour lurches from one headline to the next and from one distortion to the next. Labour downgrades and runs down the health service day after day, as it moves to the next soundbite.

Mrs. Roe: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the reasons why unemployment is falling is that British firms are now able to compete free from overwhelming union control? Does he further agree that that would all be thrown away under the Opposition's plans for a stakeholder society, which would simply hand power back to the unions?

The Prime Minister: That certainly seems to be the view of the trade unions, as Mr. Monks, the general secretary of the TUC, has confirmed. He said:

"This country needs more influential unions",

and added that the proposals for new rights to representation at work also rest on the stakeholder idea. He is not alone. Mr. John Edmonds said:

"I think ultimately we need changes in legislation."

The hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) said:

"Labour cannot govern without the support of the trade unions."

Just to show that I do not always quote Opposition Back-Benchers, let me quote the deputy leader of the Labour party—who appears to be missing. He said:

"I am at heart a trade unionist before a politician."

And he is right. We know Labour's heart, we know who pays for the Labour party, we know who owns the Labour party and we know what the leader of the Labour party is now about.

Mr. Ashdown: When the Prime Minister's predecessor, Mrs. Thatcher, said last week that his Government had lost touch with the hopes of ordinary people, whom does he think she was blaming?

The Prime Minister: It hardly loses touch with ordinary people if one removes what wrecked their savings by producing the lowest inflation levels for 50 years, the lowest mortgage rates for 30 years, the lowest unemployment rate of any major European country, the lowest basic tax rate for 50 years, and the biggest fall in crime for more than 40 years. That is what my right hon. Friend, when Prime Minister, sought to achieve; it is what we have delivered.

Sir Michael Grylls: When my right hon. Friend next meets his fellow Heads of Government in Europe, will he do all that he can to persuade them to make progress on liberalising the energy market within the European Union? Is not one of the Government's great successes the fact that we have created a competitive market in the UK, and would not our firms benefit from a competitive market throughout the European Union?

The Prime Minister: Yes, my hon. Friend is entirely right. While the single market has been an enormous success, both for us and for the rest of Europe, there remain areas across Europe where it is still not operative, and my hon. Friend mentions one of them. We shall continue to press to spread the single market to that area and others.

Q3. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 18 January. [7877]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Mullin: I am sorry to see that the bastards are plotting again. The Conservative party's current difficulties are not the Prime Minister's fault. He simply has the bad luck to be Prime Minister when the bills for the Thatcher decade are coming in. May I offer him a word of advice? He should offer members of his party not a leadership election but a general election. That would shut them up.

The Prime Minister: I know that the hon. Gentleman has some experience of leadership elections. If I remember accurately, he ran the leadership election of a losing candidate in a previous Labour party leadership election, so although I take what he says with some interest, I shall not follow it to the letter.

Mr. Mullin: He got 49 per cent., though.

The Prime Minister: Maybe, but it was not enough.

Q4. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 18 January. [7878]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Luff: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that he will respect the constitutional freedoms of this country at all times and will not seek to undermine them by entering into shabby, shoddy backroom deals, like those promised by the Leader of the Opposition with the Liberal party, British Telecom and the trade unions?

The Prime Minister: I think that I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that he requires without reservation.

Q5. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 18 January. [7879]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Ainger: Has the Prime Minister seen the figures produced by the Royal College of Nursing, which show that the number of nurses qualifying each year has fallen from some 37,000 in 1983 to only 13,000 last year? The resulting staff shortages have caused a crisis in our accident and emergency and intensive care units. Do not those figures confirm that the NHS is no longer safe in Tory hands, and never was, or is the Royal College of Nursing distorting the figures?

The Prime Minister: I will just give the hon. Gentleman the figures. There are 22,000 more doctors than there were in 1979, and 34,000 more qualified nurses. It is not the Conservative party or the Government who have cut back on the health service. The only time that that has occurred was when the hon. Gentleman's party was in office. He should recall that and bear in mind that the Conservatives have delivered increased investment to the national health service, which means better service, more front-line care, which is better and earlier, and a wider range of care.

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend will no doubt recall the excitement and pride shared by millions of children, including him and me, at the Festival of Britain, part of which for me meant visiting the capital city for the first time. May I, as a non-Londoner, assure him that it is unthinkable that the millennium celebrations should be held anywhere other than in our capital city, and that the best possible place would be Greenwich?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend touches on a matter that may be controversial in the west midlands and elsewhere. The reality is that the decision will be taken by the Millennium Commission, independently of the Government, and it is therefore not appropriate for me to comment on particular bids or to speculate about the outcome. I am sure that many others will do so, but I will await the decision of the Millennium Commission.

Business of the House

3.31 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): May I ask the Leader of the House to state the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): Yes, Madam. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 22 JANUARY—Second Reading of the Nursery Education and Grant-maintained Schools Bill.

TUESDAY 23 JANUARY—Consideration in Committee of the Finance Bill (First Day).

Motion relating to the Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations.

WEDNESDAY 24 JANUARY—Until 2 pm, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Opposition Day (2nd Allotted Day). There will be a debate on the state of the national health service, on an Opposition motion.

THURSDAY 25 JANUARY—Until about 7 o'clock, completion of consideration in Committee of the Finance Bill.

Remaining stages of the Health Service Commissioners (Amendment) Bill.

FRIDAY 26 JANUARY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 29 JANUARY—Second Reading of the Housing Bill.

I am not yet able to give definite details for Tuesday 30 January or Wednesday 31 January. One of them is likely to be Government business and the other an Opposition Day. On Thursday 1 February, I expect a debate on the Royal Navy on a motion for the Adjournment of the House. Friday 2 February will be Private Members' Bills.

Mrs. Taylor: I thank the Leader of the House for that information.

The right hon. Gentleman said that the Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations will be debated on Tuesday. Will he confirm that those regulations could be debated at a very late hour? The House felt that it was being bounced when those regulations were originally produced, and departmental mistakes occurred. In view of those difficulties, would it not have been better to guarantee that those regulations would be debated at a more civilised hour than might happen next Tuesday?

I notice that the Leader of the House has not taken up the fact that the Secretary of State for Transport said on Monday that he would welcome a debate on rail privatisation. As Ministers have acknowledged that they have a technical ability to sell off Railtrack but no direct approval or authority from this House to do so, would it not be right to seek such approval from this House before proceeding any further? In view of the Secretary of State's comments to the effect that he would welcome such a debate, will the right hon. Gentleman provide for a debate on the privatisation of Railtrack in Government time?

Is the Leader of the House aware that my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) has taken the rare step of writing to the Cabinet Secretary expressing his grave concern about the lack of distinction between the political and ministerial roles of the Secretary of State for Scotland, against the background of some recent events? Yesterday, the Scottish Office was amending its own press release because of confusion about the political content of a speech by the Secretary of State. Subsequently, a Scottish Office official was required to make an apology.

Given the sensitivity of such matters and the fact that we are in the run-up to a general election, may we have a debate on the confusion surrounding this issue—in particular, on the fact that Ministers may be abusing the rules by seeking to use civil servants for party political purposes?

Finally, the Leader of the House will remember that, last week, I raised with him the unanimous recommendation of the Select Committee on European Legislation that five directives be debated together on the Floor of the House. Can he update us on his proposals for debating these issues, which include economic and monetary union, convergence and social protection? Will the right hon. Gentleman accept in principle that there must be proper opportunity for the views of this House to be registered before Ministers participate in intergovernmental conference discussions?

Mr. Newton: I shall take those questions in reverse order. I have always made it clear that I—and the whole Government—accept the need for opportunities to be provided for Parliament's views to be expressed before European negotiations. That will continue to be our attitude. I am not yet in a position to give the hon. Lady a considered answer to the point about the five directives, to which she has once again referred.

As for the issue raised by the hon. Members for Hamilton and for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond): I am aware that the former has written to the Cabinet Secretary. I am sure that the Cabinet Secretary will seek to reply as quickly as he properly can.

As the hon. Lady virtually acknowledged, it is clear that what happened yesterday was a straightforward error on the part of Scottish Office civil servants. It resulted in some political material from my right hon. Friend's speech appearing in a Government press release. My right hon. Friend made it quite clear yesterday that he expects the Scottish Office information directorate to operate strictly in accordance with the appropriate guidance, and he has every confidence that it will do so; and that when, as happens very occasionally—and did happen on this occasion—a mistake occurs, it will be corrected.

There was extensive debate on Railtrack's privatisation during the passage of the primary legislation that created the powers which the Government now have to privatise Railtrack. It seems extraordinary that it should now be suggested that further parliamentary proceedings are required before the Government can proceed with what was agreed by Parliament.

The hon. Lady will recall that I responded—I hope, quite properly—to widespread pressure to make absolutely sure that there was an opportunity for a debate on the asylum regulations before they came into effect, against the background that it is, in the Government's view, urgently necessary to take action. The hon. Lady will also be aware of the need to make progress, for instance, on the Finance Bill. What I have proposed is

simply a way of making proper progress on important business such as the Finance Bill, while providing the opportunity that the House rightly expects to debate the asylum regulations.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Will my right hon. Friend find time for an early debate on national vocational qualifications, so that I can draw to the attention of the House and the wider public the great success of a business in my constituency, Shoefayre, six of whose shop managers were today given NVQ awards by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice)? A number of other businesses in my constituency and across the country would benefit from learning about NVQs, and the training and other qualifications that they can receive. Those schemes have been sponsored by the Government, and the public should know more about them.

Mr. Newton: I congratulate the constituents of my hon. and learned Friend on their achievement, and commend his common sense in raising the matter in the way that he has.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Is the Leader of the House aware that the Ministry of Agriculture appears to be adopting what I can only describe as a back-stairs procedure to introduce the implementation regulations for EU directive 95/29 on the welfare of animals in transit, which is exceedingly controversial not only in the livestock sector but among other groups such as animal welfare organisations?

The Ministry appears determined to use a method that would avoid the necessity of laying even a statutory instrument before Parliament and prevent any parliamentary discussion whatsoever of these controversial proposals. Will the right hon. Gentleman assure us that there will be an opportunity for hon. Members to discuss these important proposals?

Mr. Newton: I will bring the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, and will, of course, consider them myself.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I have asked my right hon. Friend previously to provide time for a debate on roads and infrastructure. The Government emphasise the need for the country to be competitive, yet, unfortunately, there has been a fairly dramatic cut in infrastructure expenditure—especially in that on roads. That is causing grave concern to my constituents in all walks of life. I refer particularly to the Alderley Edge bypass, the Poynton bypass, the Disley High Lane bypass and the Manchester airport eastern relief road—the eastern link road, which is so vital to the economic success not only of my constituency but of that of surrounding constituencies.

Mr. Newton: If I remember rightly, on the previous occasion that my hon. Friend understandably raised the matter, it transpired that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport was within earshot, and I made the point that he would no doubt consider what my hon. Friend had said. I have no doubt that he is continuing to consider what my hon. Friend has said.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is the Leader of the House aware of the need for an urgent statement on the Ministry of Defence police? There are clear indications that they are to be replaced with civilian security personnel, who may or may not have adequate training. As this is likely to be an important matter of national security, would he ask Ministers not to treat this as part of a general debate, but to come to the House and make a specific statement on what is happening in relation to the Royal Ordnance factories?

Mr. Newton: As the headquarters of the MOD police has moved, in the past couple of years, to RAF Wethersfield, I had better declare some sort of interest. Part of that interest would be to draw the hon. Lady's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Will my right hon. Friend find time for an early debate on the important subject of the allocation of postcodes, especially as it affects many of my constituents? Is he aware that the inflexibility of management in the Royal Mail means that my constituents are obliged to have Croydon postcodes, which cause them to have higher premiums on insurance policies and other things? They want Sutton postcodes, to accord with the fact that they live in the London borough of Sutton.

Mr. Newton: I must confess that I was wholly unaware of this problem until my hon. Friend raised it. I shall therefore make no comment, but refer it to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Should we not have a statement from the Secretary of State for Scotland on what responsibility he is prepared to take for the workings of his Department? Is the Leader of the House aware that many of us find it unsavoury that a civil servant should be forced to take the rap for politics being pursued at the taxpayer's expense, when every Scottish Member of Parliament knows that the Secretary of State is the person responsible for turning his Department into a Ministry of Tory propaganda?

Mr. Newton: I cannot add to what I thought were the very reasonable comments and explanation that I gave earlier. However, I reject utterly and out of hand the interpretation that the hon. Gentleman seeks to put on events.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): May I support the request by the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) that more directives issued by the European Union be debated on the Floor of the House—not least because, as I understand it, they come without sanctions attached or any requirement for enforcement, which is added by our civil service and turns mountains into molehills? Financial penalties and even criminal charges are imposed upon innocent business men going about their usual everyday tasks.

Mr. Newton: I note my hon. Friend's remarks in support of the hon. Member for Dewsbury's comments. Many people—particularly those hon. Members who took part in the consideration of immigration matters in

[Mr. Newton]

Committee before my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary—believe that the procedures for questioning and debate in Committee will prove very valuable for the House.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Starting next week, can the Government Chief Whip make regular statements informing us exactly how many temporary bodies he has in his team, and how many make the Prime Minister hear white coats flapping?

Mr. Newton: I warmly welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) back into the fold.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for a debate next week on the very important subject of religious and moral education in schools, bearing in mind the call earlier this week for a clear definition in the curriculum for teaching right and wrong, and bearing in mind the seriously bad behaviour of many young and not so young people?

Mr. Newton: I have announced the Second Reading of an education Bill for next Monday. It is not for me to say whether comments of that kind could be raised during the debate, but my hon. Friend may like to try to do so. If not, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment will answer questions in the Chamber on Wednesday.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Madam Speaker, you may remember that, before Christmas, I raised in the House the question of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland announcing the extension of the pattern of the Scottish Grand and Welsh Grand Committees to Northern Ireland. Will the Leader of the House tell us whether there have been any developments in that regard since my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and I discussed the matter with the Secretary of State? We are still waiting for an announcement.

Mr. Newton: I cannot comment beyond what I remember saying to the hon. Gentleman, in my usual friendly fashion, when he raised the matter previously. However, I have noted—as undoubtedly the hon. Gentleman has—that his hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) has put down a wide-ranging question on related matters to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for next Thursday. No doubt the hon. Gentlemen will be able to pursue those exchanges further at that time.

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North-East): Will my right hon. Friend find time in the next few weeks for a debate on local government finance, particularly on the practice of Labour-controlled councils using local council press offices as an arm of party propaganda? That is a disgraceful abuse of taxpayers' money, and I would welcome a debate on the subject.

Mr. Newton: I am glad to say that there will be an opportunity for further debate on such matters before too long, as the usual local government finance orders must come before the House in the next month or six weeks.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 288, which refers to the 1,600 jobs that Scottish Courage decided to axe this week.

[*That this House is dismayed at the decision taken by Scottish Courage to axe 1,600 jobs nationally; is appalled at the proposal to close the Fountain Head brewery in Halifax with the loss of over two hundred jobs; notes that the productivity per employee at the Halifax brewery is higher than any in the group; and calls upon Scottish Courage to reverse its decision on all these closures.*]

Is the Leader of the House aware that more than 200 of those jobs are in my constituency, and that Scottish Courage intends to close the brewery, which is one of the most efficient in its whole operation? Could he make time for an urgent debate about those job losses, and about the fact that Scottish and Newcastle took control of Courage only a few months ago, apparently intending to close down part of the operation?

Mr. Newton: I understand the hon. Lady's concern on behalf of her constituency. Equally, she must understand that decisions of that kind are not for the Government to make, but are commercial decisions for the company. However, it may be that she could find a way of raising the matter in the House if she so wished, perhaps on a Wednesday morning—although I see that she has other things on her mind for next Wednesday.

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): Will my right hon. Friend consider finding time for a debate on the plight of my constituents and those of many other right hon. and hon. Members who live near the present route of channel tunnel trains? Is he aware of the distress that is caused to thousands of people as a result of noise and disturbance? Does he agree that a debate would give the Government an opportunity to respond at greater length to the sixth report of the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, which examined the allied question of compensation for blight between the years 1990 and 1994?

Mr. Newton: I cannot promise to provide an early opportunity for further debate on those matters. They are, of course, apart from anything else, under consideration by the Committee that is considering the private Bill. I am sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends will bear in mind my hon. Friend's observations.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The Leader of the House has no doubt seen my letter to him of 10 January, the subject of which is the abuse of Welsh Question Time. The subject has appeared in early-day motion 256.

[*That this House acknowledges that Welsh oral questions provide 40 minutes, once a month, for Welsh Members of Parliament to hold the Secretary of State and fellow Welsh Offices Ministers, answerable for the executive responsibility which they exercise for wide-ranging portfolios in Wales, including employment, health, education, agriculture, local government, housing, planning, tourism and sport, environment, social services, industrial development and the Welsh language; given the limited opportunities for ensuring answerability for Government action in Wales, regards it as totally*

reprehensible that Tory honourable Members from Wales continuously should set the agenda for answerability by flooding the Order Paper with Oral Questions for that day; notes that for Monday 22nd January, amongst the first 24 names out of the ballot there are 16 honourable Members for English constituencies and only eight for Welsh constituencies; and calls on the Leader of this House to bring forward charges to the Standing Orders of the House to give precedence to Welsh constituency honourable Members for Questions tabled to the Welsh Office for oral answer.]

On Monday next, only six Members will be called who represent Welsh constituencies. Of the first 10 questions on the Order Paper, six will be asked by Members representing constituencies in England. In all, the names 17 Members from England appear on the Order Paper. Surely it is not good enough to have only 45 minutes every four weeks to examine the Executive in Wales. We are faced with an abuse, and we should have time to debate the matter and to amend Standing Orders.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman knows that, in response to such a question I shall say—I will, and it is what I believe—that this is a United Kingdom Parliament. It seems that his remarks imply—I hope that they do—support for the proposals of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales for enhancing the role of the Welsh Grand Committee. His remarks seem to strengthen the case for that.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Will my right hon. Friend consider having an early and urgent debate on local government in London? Is he aware that 120 officers of Lambeth council face the sack because they are being accused of corruption and fraud? Does that not underline the fact that, for many, new Labour and old Labour have merely become hard Labour?

Mr. Newton: Without attempting to meet the neatness of my hon. Friend's phrase, I would observe that, since the appointment of the new chief executive in 1993 and the change of political control—perhaps what my hon. Friend has said is some reflection—Lambeth at last seems to be taking some steps to put its house in order.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): The Leader of the House will have heard the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) about the activities of Scottish and Newcastle. Again, it is an example of a predator company operating in the marketplace and taking over another company without any consideration of local communities, as has happened in the case of Campbell Soups in my constituency. Is it not time that we had a major debate in Government time, so that we can perhaps consider a new framework for takeover policy? Are things not getting quite out of hand?

Mr. Newton: I suppose that I can say—yes, I can—that the hon. Gentleman puts his point in a reasonable way. Given the obvious strength of his feeling about such matters, it might well be worth his considering, if he has not already done so, seeking some time on a Wednesday morning.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): May we have a debate next week on stakeholding, which would allow the House to probe the warm word "smokescreen" that is involved, and perhaps consider the measures that would be involved, such as the restoration of trade union powers, the robbing of savers of the income that they derive, joining the ERM, and, above all, interference in the proper management of British companies?

Mr. Newton: I do not think that I can improve on the way in which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister responded to a similar question about half an hour ago.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Has the Leader of the House had time to reflect on the views expressed by Lord Howe, the former Deputy Prime Minister, who said in an interview on London Radio earlier this week that he thought that the abolition of the Greater London council was a mistake, and that a voice for London should be restored? May we have a debate on the governance of London? Among other things, we could discuss the possibility of having an elected mayor for London. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] Yes, it is a proposal dear to my heart. It is supported also by the present Deputy Prime Minister and by the right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor).

Mr. Newton: The straightforward answer to the hon. Gentleman is that I have not had time to reflect on the remarks that he attributes to my right hon. and noble Friend. I am tempted to say that I might see some merit in the proposal if it led to what I shall loosely call the translation of the hon. Gentleman from this side of the river back to the other.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): Will my right hon. Friend consider providing time for yet another debate on procedures in the House? Is he aware that a Labour Member representing a Glasgow constituency—I cannot name him, because I did not have a chance to mention to him in advance that I would be raising the matter—is starting a campaign on behalf of Muhammad Al-Masari? That campaign will jeopardise not only thousands of jobs in the United Kingdom but money that is going to the Exchequer which could otherwise be spent on education and the health service. He makes the matter worse by using House of Commons postage-paid envelopes. Is that not a disgrace?

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister commented on this matter on Tuesday, and I would not want to add to what he said.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Does the Leader of the House agree that hardly an hon. Member would not agree with the extension of nursery education for parents who wish it, but that the Nursery Education and Grant-Maintained Schools Bill, which we are to debate on Monday, is controversial, particularly in respect of financing, administration, inspection and, indeed, the very definition of nursery education? Has the Leader of the House observed that, despite the usual practice of giving powers to Secretaries of State to make regulations, the Bill provides for the Secretary of State to make only "arrangements"? Can he let us know before that debate whether this has precedent, and, if so, where?

[Mr. Nigel Spearing]

Mr. Newton: This is very much a point that should be raised in the Second Reading debate on Monday, and no doubt it will be. I am sure that it will be helpful to my right hon. Friend to have advance notice of it.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (North Warwickshire): May we have an urgent debate on the operation of the Official Secrets Act 1911, which seems on occasion to deny courts evidence that they should properly have, and citizens access to justice? I use as an example my constituent, Mr. John Dennis, of Bedworth, who is in a coma. His family are seeking to interview a former *lieutenant colonel* in the Army who controlled ambulances during the ambulance strike, and they have been told that it would breach the Official Secrets Act to do so. That seems to me to be a denial of justice, which we cannot properly sustain. The House should debate the Act.

Mr. Newton: I shall look into what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Will the Leader of the House read and perhaps discuss with his ministerial colleagues early-day motion 275, which is about the chief medical officer and Parliament?

[*That this House, whilst understanding the long-standing convention of the House that honourable Members are unable to table parliamentary questions on the internal working of government, considers that it has been extended unreasonably by not allowing honourable Members to obtain the view of the Chief Medical Officer on important public health issues of the day by asking parliamentary questions; considers that the Chief Medical Officer has wider responsibilities to the public than other civil servants; and therefore asks in the interests of public health and open government that the Government remove the block on parliamentary questions relating to the expert opinions of the Chief Medical Officer.*]

Is it not appalling that hon. Members cannot get the clear opinion of the chief medical officer on public health matters without it being filtered through a Minister—or perhaps denied by a Minister? As the chief medical officer has wider responsibilities than other civil servants in relation to public health matters, should there not be a clear line to hon. Members who want his opinion?

Mr. Newton: The code of practice on access to Government information confirmed that the advice that the chief medical officer provides to Ministers to assist in the development of their policies is confidential. As far as I am aware, there is nothing new in that, and that is very much the position with advice that is provided to or within Government, including that of the Law Officers.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): In order to dampen down the speculation fever regarding the Tory leadership and the Prime Minister's position, would it not be appropriate for the Deputy Prime Minister to make a statement to the House next week, to make it clear that under no circumstances will he do to the Prime Minister what he did to Lady Thatcher in 1990?

Mr. Newton: I noted my right hon. Friend's comments at Prime Minister's questions, as no doubt did the hon. Gentleman. I can only say that there is no need to dampen down a fire that has never been started.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): May we have a debate on transport, so that we can congratulate hon. Members on the remarkable change that has taken place in our car park? Last January, 26 vehicles in the car park were fitted with bull bars; this week, there has been none. May we also discuss early-day motion 1?

[*That this House supports Bristol Coroner Paul Forrest's call of 14th November 1995 for a ban on bull bars at the inquest on Helen Baggs aged 10 of Melksham who was killed by a Land Rover fitted with bull bars; believes that many deaths and serious injuries would have been avoided if the Government and the European Commission had swiftly acted to ban bull bar fashion accessories that concentrate and multiply the force of collisions at the level of a child's head.*]

At the same time, we should consider the debate yesterday afternoon in the other place led by the Earl of Kinnoul when it was made clear that Britain can take unilateral action to ban bull bars, but we are waiting for the European Community. Sadly, it is clear that the European Community will not act for at least two years. Why do we not take action now, to prevent future avoidable tragedies?

Mr. Newton: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman should put his point in that way, as he well knows that the Commissioner responsible for such matters is the former leader of the Labour party. I suggest that he addresses his representations to him.

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): In view of the Prime Minister's comments at the conclusion of Question Time, that Ministers would not seek to influence the choice of venue for the millennium exhibition, will the Leader of the House ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage to make a statement on the millennium to the House? Many of us in the west midlands find it rather surprising that, although the creative team appointed to run the millennium events recommends the national exhibition centre in Birmingham, it is being asked to consider another venue. The House would like reassurance that Ministers do not see the world as ending at Watford.

Mr. Newton: I can certainly give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that Ministers do not see the world as ending at Watford. We see this as a United Kingdom. For the rest, I shall bring the hon. Gentleman's request to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

Prisoners in Hospital

4.1 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the use of restraints on prisoners attending hospital, particularly women who are pregnant.

The acting Director General of the Prison Service, Richard Tilt, met Caroline Flint, the president of the Royal College of Midwives, on Monday to discuss the use of physical restraints on women prisoners admitted to hospital to give birth.

The discussions were constructive and I am very grateful to the royal college for its help. I should like to make it clear that it has never been the intention of the Prison Service to apply handcuffs or chains to women who are confirmed as being in labour, and never been the intention to apply restraints contrary to medical advice. That will continue to be the case. But the royal college has asked for certain modifications to be made to the use of restraints on pregnant women and the Prison Service has accepted its recommendations.

In future, women taken from prison to hospital to give birth will normally be escorted by two female members of prison staff. In exceptional circumstances, where this is operationally not practicable, at least one will be female. No restraints will be applied to the prisoner from the time at which she arrives at the hospital. No prison staff will be present in the delivery room, unless the prisoner requests it.

Governors will continue to be encouraged to liaise with hospital managers and midwives on these and all other security measures for women admitted to hospital to give birth.

The Royal College of Midwives has also expressed concern about the application of physical restraints to pregnant women waiting in public areas in hospitals for antenatal checks. In future, all physical restraints will be removed from a prisoner on her arrival in a hospital waiting room, unless she is judged to present a particularly high risk of escape and, of course, there is no medical objection to restraints being applied.

The Prison Service has a responsibility to balance the need to hold prisoners securely with the duty to treat them with humanity and to maintain their dignity and privacy. The modifications I have announced will, I believe, allow the Prison Service to strike a reasonable balance on behalf of the public. We are confident that this revised policy provides the correct balance without reducing security to unacceptable levels.

The Prison Service has also taken this opportunity to review its policy of applying physical restraints to other prisoners. Following a thorough risk assessment, some prisoners already attend hospital appointments without an escort under the temporary licence scheme. This will continue to apply. When a prisoner is escorted to hospital, physical restraints will continue to be used in most cases unless there is a medical objection. But where, following a rigorous risk assessment, the governor comes to the conclusion that restraints are unnecessary, they will no longer be used. In such cases, the prisoner will still be accompanied and supervised by Prison Service staff. This builds on the experience of the Prison Service in using rigorous risk assessments under the temporary licence arrangements introduced with great success last year.

Let me summarise the new arrangements. First, no woman who goes into hospital to give birth will be restrained from the time she arrives at the hospital until she leaves. Secondly, a pregnant woman who goes to hospital for antenatal checks will have her restraints removed on arrival in the waiting room, unless there is a particularly high risk of escape. Thirdly, in most other cases, physical restraints will continue to be applied, but governors retain the discretion to release prisoners on temporary licence or to send them to hospital under the supervision of staff without restraints being applied.

I am confident that those revised arrangements will strike a better balance between the various considerations that the Prison Service has to take into account. The acting Director General of the Prison Service is writing to governors with details of the new arrangements. He will keep those arrangements under review and monitor their operation.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): May I begin by welcoming the contents of the Secretary of State's announcement, but is not the truth that he has been driven to this humiliating retreat, not by decency or compassion, but by panic at the avalanche of bad publicity that has engulfed both him and his Minister of State? Is it not the case that Ministers initially believed that they could brazen their way out of this appalling situation and that, had it not been for the Channel 4 film, public outrage and ministerial bungling, that is exactly what they would have done?

As the Royal College of Midwives last July publicly condemned the obscene practice of routinely manacling pregnant women, will the Secretary of State explain why it has taken him so long to acknowledge its concerns? The Minister of State gave one limited apology on Monday, but is not a wider apology now required from the Secretary of State for the brutal and unnecessary humiliation that his policy has forced on a number of pregnant prisoners?

The Secretary of State said in his statement:

> "The Prison Service has a responsibility to balance the need to hold prisoners securely with the duty to treat them with humanity and to maintain their dignity and privacy."

But is not the truth that, until today, it had been the Secretary of State's policy that had prevented prison staff from achieving that balance? Does he accept that his Minister of State was wrong to deny, not only that Whittington hospital had expressed concerns about the practice disclosed on the Channel 4 programme, but that the prisoner concerned was chained during her labour? Is the Secretary of State aware that the woman's consultant obstetrician has derided as "factually inaccurate" the Minister's ridiculous assertion last week that labour had been established only once a form had been filled in?

Is it not the case that, under the Secretary of State's stewardship of the Prison Service, short-term political imperatives have time and again taken precedence over what is necessary to run a secure and effective service? Is not this sorry episode deeply symbolic of the Government's arrogance and inhumanity, and of the way in which they have so comprehensively lost touch with the common decency of the British people?

Mr. Howard: I entirely reject the pathetic ranting of the hon. Gentleman and the construction that he has put on the remarks made by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office in the House last week. My hon. Friend said then that a meeting was to take place between the acting Director General and the Royal College of Midwives. That meeting has taken place, and I am pleased that the Prison Service has been able to respond to the concerns of the royal college.

Far from the policy being politically motivated, the Prison Service deals with such matters. It was the Prison Service that made the original decision that led to the physical restraint of female prisoners, and it has responded positively to the concerns expressed by the Royal College of Midwives.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. Some hon. Members entered the Chamber when the Home Secretary had nearly finished his statement; others came in after he had sat down. I have their names on a list. They will understand that I cannot possibly call an hon. Member who did not hear the Home Secretary's statement: that has always been my policy. I do not want to embarrass those hon. Members, but they know who they are.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): My right hon. and learned Friend is often wrongly accused of intervening in the day-to-day management of the Prison Service. Will he accept the thanks and congratulations of many Conservative Members and, I dare say—if they were truthful—many Opposition Members as well? He has listened carefully to our concerns about this practice, not just in the past few days but for several weeks. I thank him for that, and congratulate him on his statement.

Will my right hon. and learned Friend again confirm, so that there is no shadow of doubt, that the practice at Holloway prison that gave rise to our concern was initiated not by him or any Minister, but by the Prison Service?

Mr. Howard: It is true that the original decision was made by the Prison Service, as was the decision to respond to the Royal College of Midwives. I hope, therefore, that my hon. Friend will understand if I decline to accept his congratulations on a decision made by the Prison Service.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): The new policy is welcome, but will the Home Secretary now admit that restraints have been applied to women who are clinically in labour? What steps are being taken to ensure that the Prison Service does not mislead Ministers in future, as it did in this instance—as the Minister of State told us in her personal apology to the House the other day?

Will the Home Secretary now tackle the problem of the large number of young pregnant women who are in prison partly as a result of obscenities such as the imprisonment of young women who have failed to pay a fine for not having a television licence?

Mr. Howard: The hon. and learned Gentleman asked three questions. First, the Prison Service has never intended women to be restrained while in labour; as far as I am aware, that has happened on only one occasion, some two years ago, and the Prison Service fully recognised that it had been at fault. Secondly, the acting Director General of the Prison Service is taking steps to ensure that there is no repetition of what happened last week, when, as she explained to the House, wrong information was conveyed to my hon. Friend the Minister.

Thirdly, the hon. and learned Gentleman will know full well that the courts sentence women to imprisonment only after having considered alternative punishments. It is always as a result of court decisions that women are sent to prison.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that he certainly has my support, as has my hon. Friend the Minister? I congratulate her on the way in which she has handled the issue; she has had a difficult and delicate task to perform.

Many people in the country believe that women who are in prison after committing a series of crimes—who are there because they are criminals—are handled with a reasonable amount of delicacy. They believe that, when women prisoners are expecting babies—and it is not unknown for women to become pregnant between the time of their arrest and the meting out of punishment—they are given the courtesy of being allowed to go to hospital for the delivery of their babies.

The honesty and openness displayed by the Minister are much appreciated by the public, who insist that the Government should ensure that people who are in prison for committing crimes, but must be let out to receive medical treatment, are properly restrained.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend has characteristically made a number of cogent points. I am sure that she speaks for a great many people. I will certainly ensure that her remarks are conveyed to the Prison Service.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is it not now obvious that, over a number of months, the Home Secretary received clear advice from medical and nursing staff in the hospitals concerned that the practice was putting at risk not only mothers but the children involved? Is it not also clear that the inept, incompetent and arrogant attempt by the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) to brazen out this absolutely despicable behaviour is certainly not worthy of a responsible Minister?

Mr. Howard: Neither of those allegations is true. It has always been the case, and will of course continue to be the case, that if doctors, nurses or midwives suggest that the application of restraints will damage the health of the patient, those restraints will be removed. The hon. Lady is therefore entirely mistaken in her first allegation and in her second.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm for victims of crime in Lichfield and other parts of the United Kingdom that we are discussing not innocent young gals but convicted criminals? Will he also confirm that there was never a question of the use of balls and chains—as one might believe if one read the press reports—but that we were

talking about light manacles? Will he reiterate, for victims of crime in Lichfield and elsewhere, that other forms of restraints will be used to ensure that people who escaped in the past will not escape in the future?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is entirely right in that there has undoubtedly been—perhaps inevitably—an enormous amount of distortion in the coverage of this issue. I can certainly assure him that the interests of victims remain my first priority and that prisoners will continue to be restrained.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): In response to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), the Home Secretary stated that, if any member of the medical profession in a hospital had requested the removal of restraints, it would have been carried out immediately. May I point out that he was entirely incorrect in that reply? On more than one occasion, the medical staff of the Whittington hospital in my constituency asked that the restraints be removed, yet the escorting officer refused so to do until Holloway gaol was telephoned and permission from the governor of the prison was obtained. I expect that the Home Secretary will take this opportunity to apologise to my hon. Friend and the House. Will the change in the regime apply to all women, whether pregnant or not, who have to go into hospital for treatment?

Mr. Howard: The point made by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich was that requests had repeatedly been made and not complied with. The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) said that, when requests were made, the prison officers concerned telephoned the prison before complying with the requests. If I may say so, that is an entirely different matter. Even the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate must be capable of appreciating the distinction between those two points. On her second question, I made the extent of the changes absolutely clear in my statement.

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): May I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on his speedy action in coming to the House this afternoon? It shows that he has responded with compassion to expressed concerns. Does he agree that it is the prime responsibility of the Prison Service to prevent prisoners—often dangerous—from escaping, thus protecting ordinary, innocent members of the public?

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. That of course remains the primary duty of the prison service, which will continue to do its utmost to discharge it.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Will the Home Secretary take the opportunity to apologise to women who have been subjected to barbaric treatment during labour and while giving birth? Despite what his hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) said, will the right hon. and learned Gentleman confirm that, although the women may have been convicted of crimes, the babies are innocent?

Mr. Howard: I have already said that, so far as I am aware, there has only ever been one incident, some two years ago, of one woman being wrongly restrained while she was in labour. Most people will be much more concerned about the future policy that I have outlined to the House this afternoon.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Does my right hon. and learned Friend find it significant that the shadow Home Secretary did not once mention during his intervention that every one of those women is either a convicted criminal or has been remanded in custody by a court which considers them to be dangerous or likely to abscond, and that my constituents expect that everyone sent to prison by the courts should remain there securely? Has my right hon. and learned Friend noticed a further oddity in this afternoon's question period, which is that the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Miss Nicholson)—our former colleague who resigned from the Conservative party because she said that she was concerned about the shackling of women—has not even bothered to turn up for his statement? Does he find that significant?

Mr. Howard: I agree with the first of my hon. Friend's points. Conservative Members attempt to take a balanced approach to these issues. That balance is absent from the approach of Opposition Members. I agree with my hon. Friend about the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon. I find it even more remarkable that last week she sat through the statement made by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), and did not get to her feet and utter one comment or ask one question.

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): The Home Secretary will be aware that the Government have already lost two of their members who have expressly referred to the cruel and inhumane treatment of women prisoners as one of the reasons why they realised that today's Conservative party is not the party they joined. Can he tell us what he thinks the effect of this practice has been on would-be Conservative voters? Will he also direct his mind back to 19 October 1995 when, in an answer to an intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth), he told the House that such women were not kept in chains? Will he now apologise for that?

Mr. Howard: Conservative voters expect the Government to take a balanced approach to these matters. Indeed, that is what the people of this country expect the Government to do, and that is precisely what we are doing.

During the debate in October, I dealt with the practice of prisoners under escort, and what I said was entirely accurate.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Given that the Home Secretary has finally been dragged, kicking and screaming, to reverse the odious practice of shackling prisoners, is it not time now to utter one little word to the women who have been so degraded and to their absolutely innocent babies? Is it not time to say sorry?

Mr. Howard: I have come to the House as soon as I could following the response of the Prison Service to the discussions that have taken place between it and the royal

[Mr. Howard]

college. As I said earlier, most people will be concerned about future policy, and that is what I have addressed this afternoon.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): This is a squalid and shameful episode in our penal history, and I do not think that the Secretary of State should be anything other than ashamed of his Department and himself in his conduct of the matter. I ask him directly: who was responsible for the policy of putting pregnant women in shackles when they were in hospital? If it is the responsibility of the Prison Service, it ought not to be; important issues such as this ought to be decided by Ministers. If it is his responsibility—it should be his responsibility—he should own up and apologise to the House and the country.

Mr. Howard: These detailed matters of security—*[Interruption.]* These matters of security—although I accept that they are important—are dealt with entirely by the Prison Service as operational matters. That is how the decision came to be made in the first place and that is how the Prison Service responded to the concerns expressed by the Royal College of Midwives.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): Does the Home Secretary recall that, on 19 October at column 518 of *Hansard*, he gave the House to understand not only that women prisoners were not put in chains, but that in his opinion the shackling of women prisoners was an operational matter and not a policy matter for him? Is he still contending that it is a matter of detail and only an operational matter? Does he still not appreciate how far he and the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), have failed to understand the conscience of a nation, which not only will not tolerate such degrading barbarities, but insists that Ministers themselves take responsibility for the ways in which prisoners are treated?

Mr. Howard: I have made it plain throughout the afternoon that these are operational matters for the Prison Service.

Ms Corston: So why are you here?

Mr. Howard: In answer to the sedentary intervention from the hon. Lady, I am here because I am accountable to Parliament for the decisions of the Prison Service, as has been explained on countless occasions. I accept that many operational decisions are extremely important and that this is one of them, but, as I pointed out to the hon. Gentleman when he intervened in my speech in October asking whether he should have received an answer to a letter that he had written from me rather than from the director of security of the Prison Service, given what I have said this afternoon, it was entirely appropriate that the director replied.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Does the Home Secretary not realise that his use of the word "detailed" in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) must be wholly unacceptable to most electors? Does he know whether the relevant professional organisations were consulted when the original Prison Service regulations were made? Has an inquiry been mounted into the administrative error for which the hon. Lady the Minister of State apologised earlier this week? Will he tell the House what was found and who was responsible?

Mr. Howard: The acting director general is pursuing with those directly responsible exactly what happened on that occasion, and his inquiries are not yet completed. As to the nature of the decisions that were made, I entirely accept that they are important matters, but, as I said a moment ago, many operational matters are important.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): There is profound disagreement over whether the events under dispute are matters of operational detail or of public policy that should be held to account in the House. Will the Minister return to his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson)? Although I have only limited experience of childbirth, having being involved in the birth of my own children, I do not understand how a governor at the other end of a telephone line can be expected to determine whether labour has started. Surely the point at issue is that, when medical staff say that people should not be manacled, they should not be manacled?

Mr. Howard: As I understood the question from the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate, she was taking up my point that it has always been the intention of the prison service that when a request was made by a doctor and nurse or a midwife for restraints to be removed because they were detrimental to the medical condition of the patient, they should be removed. That was the hon. Lady's question and that was the context in which I pointed out the distinction between what she described and what the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) had described earlier.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Does the Home Secretary accept that most ordinary people understand that there will be occasions when women prisoners have to be handcuffed, but what ordinary people outside this House found both preposterous and repellent was the Minister of State's proposition that, in the last few hours before labour or when a woman is walking around in the middle of labour, she is likely to make a bid for escape? We also accept that, although those women are criminals—as his hon. Friends have said over and over again—they are also human beings, and there is no reason why they should be degraded in that way at a time which most women would agree is one of the most vulnerable in their lives.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend the Minister said last week that discussions were going to take place between the acting Director General of the Prison Service and the Royal College of Midwives. I am pleased that those discussions have turned out to be so constructive and that the Prison Service has been able to respond so positively to the concerns expressed by the royal college. That was the basis of my statement to the House this afternoon.

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): Although I welcome the changes that the Home Secretary has

announced, does he accept that his statement amounts to a clear admission that the claims made by his hon. Friend the Minister of State on 9 January that existing policies were civilised and secure were clearly not the case? Will he also tell the House what arrangements will apply to remand prisoners? Will it be a different set of criteria from those announced today? After all, remand prisoners remain innocent until proven guilty.

Mr. Howard: I have dealt on a number of occasions with what my hon. Friend the Minister of State said last week. She said that discussions would take place. They have taken place and they have led to the decision of the Prison Service which I announced this afternoon. The only respect in which procedures will be different for remand prisoners is that they are not eligible for temporary release. Save for that distinction, remand prisoners, who are remanded in custody by the courts for particular reasons, will be treated in the same way as convicted prisoners.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Home Secretary acknowledge that there have been concerns for some considerable time about the handcuffing and manacling of prisoners from Holloway who are being taken to the Whittington hospital? Staff on the labour ward at that hospital have registered their concerns about that practice, through the hospital's general manager, to the Prison Service. It is only because of the publicity generated in the past few weeks that the Home Secretary has got round to showing any interest in the subject and making this statement.

Will he now publish all the details of all the complaints made by medical staff to his Department about the manacling of women prisoners and open discussions urgently with the Whittington hospital to take up its offer of allowing the community midwifery service access to the prison, to avoid the necessity of transferring women to the hospital when they could be seen there?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend the Minister of State referred in some detail in her personal statement on Monday to the correspondence that had taken place. On the Whittington's suggestion that discussions should take place with a view to providing more antenatal services in the prison, making it unnecessary for prisoners to visit hospital for those purposes, as the hon. Gentleman said, I can confirm that Holloway prison intends to enter into discussions with the hospital with a view to finding out whether such an arrangement can be put into effect.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Given that prisoners are on occasion transferred, often for compassionate reasons, from English prisons to gaols in Northern Ireland and Scotland, what discussions has the Home Secretary had on the changes in procedures with the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland and for Scotland? Things are a little better in Scotland, but not so very long ago a prisoner had to undergo an operation for haemorrhoids while handcuffed to a prison officer. I ought to add that the prison officer was both masked and gowned and the prisoner was a male, but nevertheless there are problems here.

Mr. Howard: I am not responsible for prison conditions in Scotland or Northern Ireland, and nothing in my statement is at all relevant to the transfer of prisoners between England and Wales and Scotland or Northern Ireland. As the hon. Gentleman will appreciate, my statement dealt with the restraints necessary in certain circumstances for prisoners in hospital.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): The Home Secretary is tying himself in knots. He has been maintaining for the past few minutes that the practice itself was a matter of operational policy and that the changes he has announced this afternoon are matters of detail in operational policy. Yet he said in his statement:

> "We are confident that this revised policy provides the correct balance without reducing security to unacceptable levels."

If he is not responsible for the policy, who is?

Mr. Howard: It is absolutely clear that considerations of security are matters for the Prison Service. It was right for the Prison Service to take the decision originally, and it is right for the service to have responded positively to the discussions that it had with the Royal College of Midwives.

BILL PRESENTED

Housing

Mr. Secretary Gummer, supported by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Lilley, Mr. Secretary Forsyth, Mr. Secretary Hague, Mr. David Curry, Mr. Jonathan Evans and Mr. James Clappison presented a Bill to make provision about housing, including provision about the social rented sector, houses in multiple occupation, landlord and tenant matters, the administration of housing benefit, the conduct of tenants, the allocation of housing accommodation by local housing authorities and homelessness; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 44.]

The Army

[Relevant documents: the Defence Committee has reported on the Reserve Forces in its Twelfth Report of Session 1994-95, HC 65, and on Gulf War Syndrome in its Eleventh Report, HC 197. The Seventh Special Report, HC 802, containing the Government's Replies to the Committee's Sixth Report on Defence Use of Civilian Transport Assets and Personnel, HC 86, and the Seventh Report on Reconnaissance, Intelligence, Surveillance and Target Acquisition, HC 319, i.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Knapman.]*

4.35 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): When we last debated the Army—less than one year ago—who could have imagined that, today, the deployment of some 13,000 British troops as part of a NATO-led force charged with the implementation of an historic peace agreement in the former Yugoslavia would be virtually complete? Indeed, 4 Armoured Brigade has today been declared fully operational, ahead of schedule.

After four years of truly horrific carnage, there is now the prospect of a genuine and lasting peace in the Balkans. The Army, as well as the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force, has played a vital part in achieving this much, and will be central to the agreement's future success. Of course, we must not forget that our troops are also supporting British interests around the globe; I shall mention some of the more significant deployments a little later. I should like first, however, to concentrate on what is a truly historic operation.

Since 1992, the British Army has served with great distinction in the former Yugoslavia, first as part of UNPROFOR and now as the second largest element of the NATO-led peace implementation force, IFOR. As the line is now drawn under the UNPROFOR operation, we can look back with pride at the fantastic contribution made by the British Army and, indeed, the other services, which resulted in the saving of many thousands of lives over three bitter winters in the Balkans.

It is also wholly fitting today to pay tribute to the troops from other nations who took part in the UN operation, and to the 78 UN soldiers who, sadly, were killed as a result of action by the warring parties, but today I pay a particularly wholehearted and warm tribute—as will the rest of the House—to the many British soldiers who served so well in a primarily humanitarian and peacekeeping operation, albeit that there was often little peace to keep in the past three years.

Soldiers from the Royal Armoured Corps, the infantry, the gunners, signallers, sappers, aviators, engineers, cooks, drivers, logisticians, medics and military policemen—every single one of them deserves our wholehearted and genuine admiration. The House will wish to salute their endeavours. The contribution that they made to the humanitarian effort that saved so many lives and to the restoration of relative peace and stability in central Bosnia during this period was second to none, and all those who took part can look back on their performance with considerable pride. All the soldiers, sailors and airmen who have taken part in the operation can feel a true sense of pride that what they were engaged in was extremely worthwhile and important.

Quite apart from the vital tasks of keeping the peace and helping the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to deliver vast amounts of aid, British logisticians, sappers and engineers were heavily involved in a wide variety of projects to improve the civilian infrastructure. Among other notable achievements, they have constructed more than 100 km of brand new roads. They have constructed, improved and maintained more than 1,000 km of routes to help the humanitarian effort and the distribution of aid. They have disposed of more than 3,500 mines and unexploded objects, and overseen the clearance of more than 70 major minefields, reducing the risk to innocent civilians. They have repaired and rebuilt bridges, notably a 270 ft Bailey bridge in Mostar, to link the Muslim and Croatian sides. They have reconnected water, gas and electricity supplies, including the water supply to 45,000 people in Bugojno and 26,000 more in Gorazde, thus dramatically improving the quality of life of the local people. They have also reopened and rebuilt schools and health centres.

Tragically, in the course of the UNPROFOR operation, 18 British troops were killed and 42 were seriously wounded. Our heartfelt sympathies go to the relatives of the brave men who gave their lives, not only in the service of their country but when trying to alleviate the suffering of others.

Great Britain is now making a formidable and impressive contribution to the IFOR campaign. In all, up to 13,000 British ground troops will be deployed, including the headquarters of the ACE rapid reaction corps, a divisional headquarters and an all-arms brigade. In addition, 3,000 Royal Navy and Royal Air Force personnel support the operation on the sea and in the air.

The House will also wish to acknowledge some of the unsung heroes of that operation, especially the exceptional work that has been done by the tri-service movements staff in getting all those people and their kit into theatre in an almost unbelievably tight time scale.

Ours is by far the most militarily significant contribution by a European nation and it is second in size only to the United States contingent. It is also a tangible expression of our willingness to fulfil our obligations as a key member of NATO and our international role as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. I hope that the House agrees that it carries a clear and entirely unambiguous message about our steadfast commitment to Europe's security and the absolute primacy of NATO as the bedrock of our defence policy.

Following the extraordinarily successful period when General Sir Rupert Smith and General Sir Michael Rose commanded UNPROFOR, British officers continue to exercise a defining leadership role, with General Sir Michael Walker, commander of the Allied Command Europe rapid reaction corps, ARRC, directing IFOR land operations in theatre. Indeed, it is a remarkable tribute to all that Britain has done as the framework nation for the allied rapid reaction corps—ARRC—that NATO immediately turned to the ARRC headquarters to command the land operation.

Our troops' performance in IFOR has continued to add to their formidable reputation, and it is no exaggeration to say that they have commanded the respect of all parties as they have coped in adverse and frequently arduous conditions with great fortitude and good humour.

The House may recall an example of that last July, when Corporal Neil Coull of the Royal Logistic Corps was challenged to an impromptu boxing match by the commander of a Muslim road block between Zepce and

Vitez. Corporal Coull, from Billingham in Cleveland, was on one of his routine mail runs on 11 July 1995 when he found, to his displeasure, a Canadian convoy halted at a road block. Corporal Coull insisted that mail for the British forces must be allowed through, but the road block commander barred the route—until he noticed a pair of boxing gloves in the back of the Corporal Coull's Land-Rover. Corporal Coull, a keen amateur boxer, was promptly challenged to a winner-takes-all boxing match. A makeshift ring was marked out by the roadside and, amid much cheering, Corporal Coull knocked his opponent to the ground in 30 seconds. As a result, the Queen's mail was allowed free passage to be delivered safely and on time to Her Majesty's troops.

I am grateful to the Quartermaster General, General Sir Willy Rous, chairman of the highly successful Army Boxing Association, for that admirable story.

The IFOR operation is going well. I am pleased to be able to report that, throughout Bosnia, we are witnessing a pulling back from all sides. British forces are conducting a major operation to check that withdrawal in sector south-west, and report almost complete compliance in advance of the deadline.

Not only the regular Army is deploying to Bosnia. Some 450 members of the Territorial Army and individual reservists have been called out for service. All are volunteers. They include signallers, engineers, movement controllers, military policemen and petroleum specialists. The deployment of reservists is a clear demonstration of the importance of the Territorial Army in the post cold war world. I hope to return to the reserves later in my speech.

To date, IFOR has, in the main, enjoyed the co-operation of the warring factions and has established freedom of movement throughout the theatre, including in Bosnian-Serb areas. Although there have been some breaches of the ceasefire, they have been isolated incidents. Challenges and great difficulties no doubt lie ahead, but IFOR is well equipped to deal robustly with any problems that it may face. The House will want to join me in wishing our service men and women a successful and trouble-free tour of duty and a safe return to the UK.

When we last debated the Army, the ceasefires in Northern Ireland had been in force for only six months, yet even at that early stage the effects on the lives of the people of the Province and of our armed forces had been dramatic. We are now more than 15 months into the ceasefires, and their continuation gives us cause for hope that the peace process will triumph and lift the curse of terrorism that has blighted the lives of the good people of Northern Ireland.

We have responded positively to the reduction in the terrorist threat in 1995 by relocating three battalions and a squadron to their home bases outside Northern Ireland. Greater responsibility has passed to the home service battalions of the Royal Irish Regiment, which have taken on many of the remaining tasks. The actions of the Royal Irish Regiment and its predecessors have been of a quality and standard that are in the ultimate and highest traditions of the British Army, and the commitment of full and part-time members of the regiment and their almost unbelievable courage continue to deserve our unqualified admiration and respect. I salute them.

There remains no room for complacency. The recent spate of vicious punishment attacks, which no right-minded person can justify, shows that violence has by no means disappeared in Northern Ireland. All terrorist organisations still have access to large quantities of illegal weapons. So, as we have said many times before, although we are committed to a return to exclusively civilian policing, we must not and will not lower our guard prematurely. Our troops remain prepared to assist the Royal Ulster Constabulary in whatever way they can.

For the majority, particularly those serving on two-year resident tours accompanied by their families, the reduction in routine support to the RUC has provided welcome opportunities to undertake training in a wide range of military skills. It has also been possible to take a more active part in community relations projects. I had a heartening visit to East Tyrone just before Christmas to see the Irish Guards, whose achievements in building bridges for the local community were outstanding and demonstrated what could be achieved in a range of activities by bright, dedicated and committed officers and men.

Beyond those two major commitments, Army units and individuals are deployed worldwide.

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way, and I apologise for not being in the Chamber for the first few minutes of his speech.

Members of the Royal Irish Regiment and the Army in general will appreciate the Minister's remarks in respect of their service in Northern Ireland. However, despite the best intentions of its commanding officers and those responsible for it, the Army will be underemployed as a result of the present ceasefire. Is the Minister aware that extra resources in terms of training facilities and extra instructors, for example, would greatly benefit the Army in Northern Ireland? The last thing that we want is boredom and a lowering of morale because the Army is underemployed, because it is doing a necessary job by remaining in Northern Ireland while the ceasefire is so tenuous.

Mr. Soames: The hon. Gentleman, who has an outstanding and extremely gallant record, knows that we have in Northern Ireland a remarkable commander, General Sir Roger Wheeler, who is entirely aware of the difficulties that may arise, and deeply conscious of the need to ensure that the troops are well employed, well led and well motivated, and understand their role and mission clearly. I am happy to assure the hon. Gentleman that that is the case. We will watch the situation closely.

Beyond the two major commitments in Bosnia and Northern Ireland, Army units and individuals are deployed worldwide in the vigorous support of British interests. From Cyprus to Brunei, from the Transcaucasus to the Falklands, the British Army is a visible element of the Government's commitment to peace and security, and to the determined and vigorous pursuit of our national interests.

The House will recall the key role that the Army has played in helping to form South Africa's new army, and so to underpin the hard-won peace. Also in Africa, a self-supporting logistics battalion of some 650 personnel undertook a three-month deployment to Angola, starting

[Mr. Soames]

from May 1995, where they played a vital part in the United Nations peacekeeping operation. Their task was to establish the logistic infrastructure for the United Nations Angola verification mission. Without that infrastructure, the mission would not have succeeded and the greatest credit attaches to the work of our troops.

The battalion was drawn mainly from the Royal Logistic Corps, with elements from the Royal Engineers; the Royal Corps of Signals; the Welsh Guards; 4 Field Ambulance; and the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. They were supported by the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Sir Galahad, and by aircraft and specialists from the Royal Air Force. They set up and handed over to UN contractors a comprehensive system for receiving, storing and distributing supplies to peacekeepers in the field. They also helped the arrival and onward deployment of infantry battalions and supporting units from other nations.

The operation was by no means straightforward, and the UN force commander expressed his exceptional appreciation of the British contingent's part in the critical initial phase. A small group of staff officers remains at the UN force headquarters in Luanda, where it has played an influential role in planning and organising the UN operation.

Clearly, the Army is and has been engaged on a large number of operational commitments. I make no apology for that. Operations are the raison d'être of an army.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): So far, my hon. Friend has not mentioned Army bands. Will he join me in paying a warm tribute to British Army bands, whose continuing high standard of excellence is the envy of the entire world? They enhance Army morale and they are trained at the Kneller Hall Royal Military School of Music in Twickenham. Can my hon. Friend confirm that the new bandstand is now under construction and that that further mark of confidence in Kneller Hall underlines the suitability of that location as the natural site for any future defence school of music?

Mr. Soames: Well, I do not know where to start. My hon. Friend's vigorous championing of the Army school of music is a role model for all hon. Members who wish to promote their constituency interests. I agree with everything he said about Army bands. In 1995, in the celebrations of VE day and VJ day, we saw the wonder of Army bands from all over the United Kingdom at their best. I wholly endorse everything that my hon. Friend said and I am happy to give him any assurances that will lay his mind to rest. The bandstand is being built, and if it was not, it will be now.

As I have said, the Army is extremely busy. Indeed, it is the invaluable experience of operations that sharpens and hones the remarkable skills and exceptional professionalism of the British Army. The truth is that it is the operational deployments that help to make the Army such a stimulating and rewarding career.

However, there are understandable fears that the Army is over-extended. In this context, I wish to reaffirm the Government's commitment to achieving an average operational tour interval for infantry battalions of 24 months.

In 1995-96, we shall achieve an average interval of only about 22 months for the infantry, although we shall exceed the target comfortably for the Royal Artillery and the Royal Armoured Corps. On the basis of current commitments, including the continuing IFOR deployment, we expect to meet the target of 24 months for the infantry in 1996-97.

When the Army is successfully meeting a high level of commitments and training extremely hard for other contingency tasks which we lay on it, I recognise the real pressures that are brought to bear on the families of service men and women. I take this opportunity to pay the warmest possible tribute to Army wives and their families and, at a time of high operational requirements, when their loved ones are away a great deal, to acknowledge each and every Army family for their patience and forbearance.

As a former soldier, I shall always be grateful for the spontaneous generosity, kindness and good humour of service families. I remember the great importance of "the patch" and all that that means to service life. I am personally very conscious that service families do not always have an easy life. I want them to know that their concerns and anxieties are at the forefront of our thoughts when difficult decisions and judgments have to be made.

The Army is, of course, playing a major role in the establishment of the new joint rapid deployment force—the JRDF. The Fifth Airborne Brigade, with its two battalions of the Parachute Regiment, and two Airland infantry battalions, with supporting artillery, engineer and logistics units, forms part of the core around which the JRDF will be structured, and can be tailored to meet the individual requirements of any particular task.

That force, which will be held at a high state of readiness, will be a major enhancement to our ability to project power quickly in support of British interests worldwide—and will make good use of the fearsome specialist skills and versatility for which the Parachute Regiment is justly famous.

Such operations reinforce the great respect that is felt for the British Army worldwide. They also play an important part in making a career in the Army so stimulating and fascinating for the thousands of young men and women who pass through its ranks. Indeed, a career in the Army continues to offer a rewarding and exciting life, with excellent opportunities not to be found in any other walk of life.

This very afternoon, for example, as we sit in a warm House of Commons, elements of the lst Battalion the Parachute Regiment, 7 Royal Horse Artillery, 36 Engineer Regiment and supporting arms are in the Cascade mountains of Washington state, USA, on a major battalion-level training exercise. Also, a battery from 1 Royal Horse Artillery is exercising in Kenya, and a squadron of the Household Cavalry is exercising in Cyprus.

A small team has been dispatched to Zimbabwe to assist the Zimbabwean armed forces in training their troops in awareness of the threat from landmines before they deploy a battalion to Angola; a British colonel is acting as deputy chief of staff of the Latvian armed forces; and a colour sergeant has returned today from giving a bagpipe instructor's course in Colombia.

Loan service personnel are deployed all over the world from Belize to Bermuda, Malaysia to Mauritius and South Africa to Singapore. That is in addition to on-going jungle warfare training in Brunei and major exercises on the

Suffield plains of Canada, where the British Army sustains and justifies its ability still to be able to prosecute the high intensity land battle.

Closer to home, on Salisbury plain, 32 Regiment Royal Artillery are conducting live firing whilst young company commanders are participating in Exercise Globetrotter—an all-arms tactics course.

A platoon commanders' battle course is taking place in the Brecon Beacons, and recruit training is continues to be carried out at Glencorse in Scotland. Meanwhile, the Army Air Corps is using the battle group simulator at Catterick. In the United Kingdom and in Germany, the Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters, the Queen's Lancashire Regiment and a squadron of the Light Dragoons are working up to deploy to Bosnia between February and May. There really is no other career in the United Kingdom that can offer such wonderful diversity, responsibility and excitement.

To sustain such a level of performance into the future, we must continue to attract a sufficient number of high-quality recruits to the service. To maintain the right balance of age and experience, the Army needs to recruit about 15,000 young soldiers each year. By and large, the fighting end of the Army is a profession for the young, and a regular inflow of recruits is essential if an appropriate structure of age and rank is to be retained.

This is truly a daunting target. The truth is that fewer volunteers than we would like are coming forward, particularly for service in the combat arms, so we are taking urgent action to ensure that the Army will get—and can keep—the soldiers that it needs.

As part of this, we are running a well targeted and carefully thought out advertising campaign to meet the shortfall in recruits to some units. Furthermore, a recruiting initiative was launched last week with the Employment Service to advertise jobs in the armed forces at 1,100 jobcentres nationwide. We are confident that, although the initiative will not solve all the problems, it will be of considerable benefit to the services and tap into a pool of young people who may not have considered a service career before.

Meanwhile, regiments are undertaking vigorous recruiting efforts, and we are studying, with the Chief of the General Staff and the Army Board, how we may further fortify, refresh and sustain the historic county and regional links with the Army, to which it and they rightly attach the greatest importance.

An Army career is still without parallel in the variety and excitement it provides and in the diverse trades and specialties that it offers.

Improving recruitment, however, is only part of the solution. We must also improve the rate of retention, especially of young soldiers. Accordingly, we have introduced a re-engagement bounty to encourage young trained soldiers to remain in the Army, with all the valuable and specialist skills that they acquire. The Adjutant General and his excellent team are looking at ideas such as modern apprenticeships and bringing military qualifications more into line with the requirements of civilian employers—through the introduction of NVQs, for example.

I acknowledge with gratitude the help of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in this context. I attach the greatest importance to all this, but we have much still to do and we are pushing ahead with determination and vigour.

A further valuable source of potential recruits are the cadet forces, which provide many young people with their first experience of the armed forces and the service way of life. They also play an important wider role in our national life, helping young people to develop good citizenship, self-reliance and confidence through the provision of challenging activities and valuable and exciting training. Many cadets become role models in their communities.

I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the truly magnificent dedication and leadership provided by thousands of adult volunteers, who give of their spare time to run cadet units and to make them the great success that they are. I thank them all.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Just last Friday, I formally opened the Army cadet force hall in Port Glasgow. Although I appreciated the smartness of the youngsters and of their NCOs and other officers, I was struck by the rather sparse resources devoted to their training. I hope that the Minister's officials will carefully consider any requests for further resources from this and other cadet forces in the west of Scotland.

Mr. Soames: I can think of no one better than a former royal military policeman to open a cadet branch—it was lucky to have the hon. Gentleman. I hear what he says: these units are not provided for as generously as we would like, but we have a finite sum of money and we have to spread it as best we can. If the hon. Gentleman has any specific ideas, I shall be happy to attend to them. I am delighted that he took the trouble to go and visit the Army cadets, and I urge all hon. Members never to miss an opportunity to do the same. They will leave the cadet forces feeling immensely encouraged if they do.

Returning to the reserve forces, I should like to take this opportunity to stress again the Government's wholehearted commitment to the Territorial Army and all the reserve forces. They make a truly invaluable contribution to our defence capability and are, above all, an integral part of our military operation.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): Does my hon. Friend accept that there is tremendous excitement and enthusiasm on the part of all reservists, particularly those in the Royal Auxiliary Air Force, at the new opportunities that they will get from the Reserve Forces Bill? The sooner it is passed, the better, so that they can get on with serving the country as they want to.

Mr. Soames: I thank my right hon. Friend for those remarks, and I pay tribute to the wonderful work he has done over the years, particularly with the Royal Air Force reserves, to whom he has made a magnificent contribution. I completely agree with him. We hope that the Bill will have a speedy passage through the House, commanding support from both sides.

We are truly fortunate to be able to draw on the splendid commitment and skills of the men and women who serve with the reserves. The whole House will agree that their genuine professionalism, dedication and commitment are well illustrated by those who have chosen to serve in Bosnia. Nor should we forget that, even before the deployment of IFOR, there have been and still are other reservists from all three reserve forces supporting operations in the former Yugoslavia.

[Mr. Soames]

In addition to the formal process of call-out, members of the TA undertake short periods of service with members of the regular Army, deploying on operational tours and exercises. For example, last year, the TA completed a two-stage trial deployment to the Falkland islands. Many useful lessons were learned, and we have now agreed that TA platoons will regularly accompany Army units deployed to the Falklands.

The whole House agrees, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) said, that we should make greater use of the expertise of reservists. My visits to reserve units confirm that they are extremely keen to be given greater opportunities to use their skills. We therefore plan to use reserves more widely in the future, particularly to support our regular forces when unpredictable commitments arise.

The House is aware that the necessary new legislation for this, the Reserve Forces Bill, forms part of the Government's legislative programme and was introduced in another place on 16 November. I look forward to debating it later in the year. It has received widespread support from those affected by it. It is practical and, I think, sensible, and I welcome the statements by the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), who has promised to give it a fair wind.

Before concluding, I should like to make a couple of disparate points. First, I hope that the House realises—and that the country realises—how incredibly lucky we are in Great Britain to have such a superb Army. At every level of command and throughout all ranks, the Army is exceptional in its personal and professional standards, in its team work, and in its highly developed sense of cohesion, identity, duty and obligation. This institution is a matchless asset. It is a great credit to the quality of the Army's leadership that, in a period of considerable upheaval, it has retained extraordinary and exceptional flexibility combined with greater clarity of purpose and endeavour.

It is undeniable that the United Kingdom remains one of the very few nations capable of playing a telling role in world affairs. Membership of the world's key organisations brings real and unavoidable responsibilities and obligations. We regard it as our clear duty to meet those obligations. An efficient, mobile and powerful Army is a vital part of those obligations, and that is truly what we have today.

It is quite true, of course, that the reorganisations of the past few years have inevitably extracted a price in terms of the pressure and upheaval that they have caused.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I am sure that the Minister will join me in saying how fortunate we are to have such excellent manufacturers of military equipment. I refer, of course, to Land-Rover and to Marshalls of Cambridge and the Ministry of Defence's decision, announced today, to order 800 military ambulances. I am sure that he would wish to join me in congratulating both firms and their work forces on winning the contract.

Mr. Soames: I do, but I hope to say a little more about that if the hon. Lady will give me a moment. I acknowledge her interest.

The big decisions have been taken. The restructuring of the front line as set out in "Britain's Defence for the '90s" is complete, and the Government believe that the front line is now, in broad terms, correctly configured for today's uncertain and troubled world. Of course, there are always gaps where we would like to see more and there are difficulties and problems that we have to overcome; that is inevitable, but overcome them we shall.

The Labour party can indulge in as much convoluted arithmetic as it likes on the precise numerical strength of the Army and the exact—and usually greatly exaggerated—size of the recruiting shortfall. The real strength of the front line is not just a matter of numbers, important though that it is; it is the ability to do the business that matters. The Army clearly can and regularly does.

The re-equipment programme of the past few years is delivering, and will continue to deliver, equipment that enables the Army to operate at an exceptional level of effectiveness—AS 90, Challenger, Warrior and, towards the end of the decade, Apache. The Army, however, could not carry out its task without its essential support vehicle fleet, and I am therefore pleased that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement has today announced the procurement of some 8,000 new Land-Rover utility vehicles, about 800 new Land-Rover ambulances and a further 65 Pinzgauer heavy duty utility vehicles.

Sir Anthony Grant (South-West Cambridgeshire): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that announcement, which will give great pleasure to Cambridgeshire in particular and to British industry as a whole. Does he agree that much credit for that wise decision should go to the care, courtesy and unfailing scrupulousness and sagacity of my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement?

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend is quite right. I have always found my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement to be unfailingly courteous, extremely sagacious and not at all devious. I wholly endorse the points that my hon. Friend made and applaud the great support given by him and other hon. Members with a constituency interest in the matter. The decision taken by my hon. Friend the Minister will prove to be the right one. It is good news for the Army and, as my hon. Friend said, it will be welcome to Land-Rover and its sub-contractors, including Marshalls of Cambridge.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Does my hon. Friend accept that Securicor Steyr, which also put in a bid for the ambulance contract, had an excellent record in the trials? Indeed, its vehicle broke down only once, compared to Land-Rover's 17 times. Does he accept that that bid also had some merits, which made it a strong contender, and that that is why the MOD has shown such confidence in Steyr by ordering 65 heavy duty lorries for other purposes?

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend is correct. We have indeed ordered a number of Steyr vehicles. I understand that its bid was good, but my hon. Friend the Minister has come to his conclusion. It was an admirable and well-fought competition. I am glad that the matter is now settled. It is but one of the matters to which the House

will wish to turn its attention during a broader—and important—debate on the whole Army. I know that those decisions, which are worth more than £200 million and will sustain more than 500 jobs, will be welcomed on both sides of the House.

The soldier in the field on operations would tell you, Madam Deputy Speaker, were you to ask him—and he would be very pleased to see you—that whatever problems we have, and there are many, he has never been better equipped or supported. When the deployment of IFOR is complete, more than one third of the Army will be on, preparing for or recovering from operational commitments. At the same time, it will continue with the implementation of important, far-reaching and profound changes. I am extremely proud to be able to praise the loyalty, dedication and professionalism of all those in the Army, regular or reservist, which are unmatched by any other army in the world.

One does not become the best by accident and it is no accident that the British Army is one of the best trained, led and equipped—and undoubtedly the most highly respected—armies in the world. It is the aim of Her Majesty's Government to keep it that way.

5.15 pm

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): In some ways, that was a comprehensive speech. I know that Tory Members are well read. It has always struck me that the mark of the great man is the capacity to combine the sweep of strategy with a grasp of detail. I was therefore deeply impressed with the manner in which the Minister of State for the Armed Forces could tear himself away from his analysis of the almost total integration of the social structures of Rwanda to respond immediately on the question of the bandstand at Twickenham. He has that mark of the great man.

In other ways, especially in the light of the past few weeks, it was rather an odd speech. There seemed to be no cloud on the horizon, and no attempt was made to raise an umbrella against the deluge that has been falling on the Ministry of Defence, and especially on the Secretary of State for Defence, since the beginning of the year. I shall return to that point.

I shall start with the subject of our service men and women, especially those of the Army. The Minister mentioned the vast array of operations in which the members of our Army are involved—from the Transcaucasus to the Falklands was perhaps the most graphic description. All hon. Members agree with the conviction and sincerity of his tribute to the troops.

The Minister pointed out that those same troops participate fully in the activity of the largest land army to be assembled in continental Europe since the end of the second world war. I think that he referred to it as an "historic operation". It is historic in respect not only of its size but of its objectives. He mentioned—it was worth mentioning, and he spent some time on it—the practical details of the products of the British Army presence in Bosnia: the bridges, the hospitals, the skills and, not least, the thousands of lives saved, directly or indirectly, by the production of roads and shelters.

We commend to the British people, should there be any doubt about it, the presence in Bosnia of British armed forces under the limited time scale and with their limited but extremely important objectives. They serve not as an instrument of war but as a means of peace. Their task is not to take life but to preserve it; not to wreak destruction but to construct order. We are rightly proud of them, not only because they have, as ever, responded to the will of the House, but also because, by serving our national interests, they are furthering the wider interests of peace, justice, order and international law of behalf of the world community.

Those troops not only represent the practical reality, but are also a symbol of the challenge which defence planners and politicians in this country have faced for the past 10 years: to shape a post-imperial role for the British Army and the British armed forces. In referring to our "post-imperial" role, some hon. Members may point out quite correctly that that challenge is some 50 years old. If there were a watershed for the end of empire, surely the ending of the second world war and events in the years immediately following it—certainly until 1956—represented such a watershed.

However, in a sense, that period left us with no choice. At the time, Dean Acheson said quite properly that the British had lost an empire but had not yet found a role. Our role was imposed upon us and upon our armed forces by the cold war. It is only now, free from the burdens of empire and the imposition of a massive direct external threat, that we face the complex task of reformulating our response to a rapidly changing world, and, in the context of that response, reshaping our armed forces.

Our Army's presence in Bosnia does not represent simply a humanitarian mission or a practical, beneficial extension of this country's foreign policy: it is part of our evolving response to that new and complex world. The world is changing rapidly, and the complexities of the threats and the risks that our troops face are multiplying.

Of course, we take heart from the peace advances in Bosnia, at home in Northern Ireland and in the middle east. However, the recent events in Chechnya; the civil war in Georgia, which has reached a stalemate and has hopefully ended; the little reported war between Azerbaijan and Armenia—I know that several hon. Members have visited those countries—and a hundred other instances remind us constantly of the potential dangers we face from many directions.

Only this week, we were reminded of the dangers—if we needed any reminder—when researchers at Harvard university's centre for science and international affairs gave the latest of a series of warnings that the threat of nuclear disaster is probably as high now as it was at the height of the cold war, because of the smuggling of nuclear fissile materials and the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

The smuggling of nuclear material, terrorism, border disputes, ethnic wars and fundamentalist extremism—I will not rehearse the arguments, as they are well known to hon. Members—are only the headline dangers in a world that has been deprived of the icy stability of the cold war and the disintegration of the Soviet empire.

Labour Members have argued for some time that the Government have proved inadequate to the task of meeting those challenges. Naturally, the Government have denied that. I found it rather odd that the Minister offered no defence of the Government's policies, as opposed to defending the Army's operations, which I fully accept have a legitimate place in the debate. If any evidence were needed of the incompetent, bumbling, bungling,

[Dr. John Reid]

incoherent and at times demoralising mess that the Government have made, we have seen it in the first two weeks of 1996.

I think that that is why the Minister of State for the Armed Forces had such a difficult time tonight defending the Government's record. I have no doubts about the Minister's ability and courage; he is an able and a courageous champion, and tonight he spoke in his usual stentorian fashion. In fact, he has become rather a champion of distressed gentlefolk of late.

He is prepared to ride out one day in defence of the heir to the throne, and the next in defence of the heir to the Conservative party leadership. Perhaps, tomorrow, he will have a whip round for the Duchess of York. However, even the Minister of State faced a daunting task in attempting to defend the Government's policy record, so he avoided it altogether.

I remind him of some of the comments that have been made in the past few weeks, not by dangerous left wingers on the Opposition Benches or by fringe groups outside this place, but by people from the establishment, who are reasonably respected by the Army and by the entire armed forces. The crescendo of criticism is so deafening that even the Secretary of State for Defence must hear it.

I turn to the remarks of Lieutenant-General Sir David Young, former General Officer Commanding, Scotland, in the *Daily Mail* of 12 January. His comments are relevant, because I know the strenuous efforts that the Minister and others are making to recruit to the armed forces. Lieutenant-General Sir David Young said:

"Were a bright youngster now to seek my advice on whether to pursue a career in the armed forces, I would sadly be unable to offer unequivocal encouragement".

In the same article, he spoke of

"increasing overstretch, insufficient training, bad manning levels, continual alterations and errors of judgment".

He referred also to

"cutbacks and changes which have severely weakened the structure and morale of all the services . . . a marked loss of continuity, shared history and tradition; all the qualities which inspire a sense of loyalty and cohesion".

That is a pretty comprehensive and damning indictment by a former GOC Scotland. Perhaps most damning of all were his comments on the tragic waste of talent in the Army. He said:

"Sergeants, sergeant-majors and officers . . . All top-rate soldiers . . . are choosing to leave the Army"—

not because of their age, as the Minister would have us believe, but

"before the axe falls on them. The traditional philosophy of 'my country right or wrong' is harder and harder to maintain in the face of politicians who fail to recognise the special commitment required of servicemen and servicewomen".

Rarely have I heard a more damning indictment of the Government's defence policy, and rarely have I heard such silence from Government Back Benchers when such criticism is levelled.

No sooner had the Minister's reputation on the Army been machine-gunned than another senior officer torpedoed the Government's policy on the Navy. The following day, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Nicholas Hill-Norton—who I believe is known to the Secretary of State and to Ministers—warned that the Government have left this country

"a nation unable to defend itself".

I have no knowledge about Admiral Hill-Norton's judgment; I do not know whether he would know a creep if he saw one. However, he certainly recognises a walking disaster of a policy when he sees it. *[Interruption.]* Ministers are now intervening from a sedentary position. The Minister had 40 minutes in which to defend the Government's policy, and Conservative Members have been remarkably acquiescent in the face of stirring criticism from major figures in the military world.

If the Government will not accept criticism from the military or from us, what about the criticism of their friends? Yesterday, the *Daily Express*—I believe that it is now the new *Daily Express*; perhaps, like new Labour, it is turning over a new leaf—contained a very interesting editorial. I do not know whether Ministers have had a chance to read it; I do not want to embarrass them too much. I shall not read all of the editorial, although I know that my hon. Friends would like to hear it. I shall quote merely one or two lines.

The editorial states:

"under Michael Portillo's stewardship, Britain's defences are in danger of becoming a laughing stock".

Lady Olga Maitland: Absolute nonsense. Come off it.

Dr. Reid: That is what the *Daily Express* editorial said; I do not know who wrote it. It was probably some fifth-columnist red left-winger who has been working under cover at the *Express* since 1945 and has only now come out to undermine the Tory Government.

The editorial continues:

"Talk privately to almost anyone of any rank in our Forces and the inescapable message you will hear is the same. Their morale is rock bottom, and their faith in the Secretary of State for Defence even lower".

Five paragraphs later, the editorial continues:

"it demeans Mr. Portillo's office, making him seem nothing better than a squalid little estate agent".

Mr. Soames: In view of the generous words that the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) has extended to me, I am reluctant to say that he is making a total fool of himself. The *Daily Express* editorial and the extract that he has read from it is so idiotic, fatuous and so far from the truth that I am amazed that the hon. Gentleman would bother to introduce it into a serious debate on the armed forces. It proves his ignorance of affairs in the armed forces. If he believes that it is credible that he can say that the morale of our armed forces is at rock bottom, he must come to understand that that is fundamentally, totally and utterly untrue, devoid, null and invalid.

Dr. Reid: I do not mind the Minister calling me ignorant. Similarly, I do not mind him calling the *Daily Express* ignorant. I do not mind him describing colonels in chief as barmy or admirals of the fleet as being wired to the moon. I do not object to a GOC Scotland being described as having no appreciation of what is going on, or to the Minister rejecting the criticisms of Defence Committees. But has the Minister never considered, in the

face of all this criticism, from traditional allies as well as traditional foes, that perhaps that army is not marching out of step, but that perhaps he and the Secretary of State are the ones who are out of step?

I quoted directly from *The Express*, the *Daily Mail*, a former GOC Scotland and a former admiral of the fleet. If the Minister thinks that he can throw aside all criticisms by describing them only as the product of ignorance, he begins to take on some of the faults of his immediate superior. That will not bode well for him or for the armed forces.

Mr. Soames: I was at great pains to stress that there are always gaps, difficulties and problems. There are always things that, if we had the money, we would wish to do better. There will always be equipment that we would wish we could buy. However, the hon. Gentleman's portrayal of the armed forces is a travesty. It is not reality. Retired officers, however great and distinguished they may be, are not truly in touch with today's Army. I beg the hon. Gentleman to understand that what he is saying about the Army is a travesty. It is entirely untrue.

Dr. Reid: I seem unable to get through to the Minister. When he gets round to checking what I have said, he will find that I have quoted at great length others whose views, presumably, the Minister does not respect.

I shall talk also about recruitment. I have been warning the Minister for three years about overstretch, yet I have been accused of ignorance. He has talked about the average interval of tours of duty being 24 months. He used to refer to the minimum interval being 24 months. Tonight, it is the average. He has denied overstretch, as did his predecessors. He has been proved wrong, and he resents the growing public awareness of that.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Reid: I shall give way to the hon. and learned Gentleman before I deal specifically with the shortage that has been created by the Government.

Mr. Garnier: I say from the bottom of my heart that I am deeply disappointed that the hon. Gentleman has thought fit to descend into personal abuse in this of all debates. I do not mind whether the hon. Gentleman is quoting others or using his own words, but it is a pity that, as I have said, in this of all debates he has felt it necessary to descend into personal abuse.

Will he comment on the Labour party's defence policies, and how they differ now, if they do at all, from those that he and his right hon. and hon. Friends and other Labour party candidates were espousing during the general election? Is it not right that, during that election, the Labour party was advocating massive cuts in defence expenditure—even greater than those advocated by the Liberal Democrats?

Dr. Reid: The answer to the last question is no. The hon. and learned Gentleman has talked about personal abuse. I shall explain that the abuse levelled against the Secretary of State should not be personal. It reflects a political difference that I shall attempt to explain.

After 12 years of hearing personal abuse heaped upon the integrity and patriotism of Opposition Members by the hon. and learned Gentleman's right hon. and hon. Friends, I am deeply moved by the sensitivity that apparently comes across the Conservative party when it gets around to defence. I have not engaged in any personal abuse. The only comment that I have made of a personal nature was in praise of the Minister of State. I have, however, quoted others.

I shall explain later why what Conservative Members consider to be a personal foible reflects political incompatibility between the views of the Secretary of State and the nature, history, tradition and ethos of the British armed forces, if the Minister will give me the time to do so.

Sir Jim Spicer (West Dorset): My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) referred to Labour party policy at the time of the general election. I do not want to talk about that. Instead, I shall ask a question. Retired officers, as my hon. Friend the Minister has said, are saying that they would like more money to be spent on our armed forces. So would every officer in the armed forces. Indeed, everyone in the armed forces would take that view. Does the hon. Gentleman agree with those who say that they would like more? Would he commit his party to spending more on our armed forces in future than the Government are now?

Dr. Reid: I commend the hon. Gentleman to read the articles to which I have referred. It is not simply that those concerned want more—indeed, they are not saying that they want more. Instead, they are criticising incoherence, lack of planning, inconsistency, changed judgments and lack of training. They are criticising the planning that has resulted in a shortage of soldiers. Conservatives demean the argument by saying that there is merely a wish to see more.

The Minister talked about shortage of men, and—I give him this—said that it was not merely a matter of making soldiers redundant and then bringing in other soldiers to replace them because of shortage. I accept that there are age differences. I appreciate that many of the soldiers going out are older than many of the soldiers coming in. I understand that some units are up to establishment, while others are over-subscribed. At the same time, some units are under-subscribed.

We warned the Government, however, of the demographic curve. We told them that the cuts that they were imposing would result, first, in overstretch, secondly in shortages, and thirdly in the destruction of morale. We were told that we were ignorant. The Government said that we knew nothing about defence. If we were ignorant then for saying what has turned out to be right, we are pleased to be called ignorant again today. The fact is that we are still right.

A number of people, including Sir Michael Rose, have expressed reservations about the recruitment of soldiers for the infantry and other regiments through jobcentres.

Mr. Soames: On a point of accuracy, Sir Michael Rose has expressed no such reservations. In a letter to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, he made it clear that he had expressed no such view. He made it clear also that he had every confidence that an important initiative had been taken that could go some way towards helping the Army.

[Mr. Soames]

Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House in which areas the Army is short of training? Secondly, in what units that he has visited, or knows about, is morale a problem?

Dr. Reid: I am not here to report back to the Minister on any visit that I have made or on any comments that have been made to me. Similarly, I would not make comments from the Opposition Dispatch Box on what I have been told by chiefs of staff when I have met them. If I divulged that information, the Minister would be the first—quite correctly—to condemn me for doing so.

Let me stick to recruitment. The Government spend hundreds of millions of pounds making soldiers redundant. That is the first cock-up. The Government then find that there is a shortage of soldiers, and spend hundreds of millions on recruiting them. The Government then run down the Army's recruitment centres. When we are desperate for soldiers, there are no recruitment services. That is the second mess.

A press release last week proudly boasted—making a virtue out of a necessity, as we no longer have the resources to recruit people directly through Army recruitment centres—that recruitment will be through jobcentres. The Government have even made a mess of that. I have read the press release carefully. It said:

"By using the nationwide network of about 1100 jobcentres the armed forces are giving easy access to quality jobs."

What it did not mention is that, under current legislation, an unemployed person in receipt of unemployment benefit who unreasonably refuses available employment at a jobcentre can be financially penalised. That is the product of the thinking of the Secretary of State for Defence, in his previous incarnation as Secretary of State for Employment. Let me tell hon. Members in simple terms what that means. A refusal to accept a job at a jobcentre can mean a cut in benefit of up to 40 per cent.

The jobseekers regulations, which we debated as late as yesterday in the House, make the situation even worse. Under the regulations, anyone who has been unemployed for more than six months at a jobcentre will have to accept any job offered. I have checked the press release, the existing regulations and the Jobseekers Bill. There are no specific qualifications to the regulations that exclude the recruitment to the armed forces from their provisions. The published regulations are clear. Any fit young person on unemployment benefit who visits his jobcentre but refuses to accept the offer of enlistment in the Army could have his benefit withdrawn.

Whether by incompetence or intent, Ministers have introduced creeping conscription into Britain.

Mr. Soames *indicated dissent.*

Dr. Reid: The Minister may shake his head. He does not think that it matters. I am not saying that it was intended; it may just be incompetence again.

The Minister can tell us whether there are special arrangements, private agreements, informal assurances that it will not happen, but we want it in black and white, in published regulations, because we in the Labour party, the armed forces and the people of this country want nothing to do with financial press-ganging. We do not want any creeping conscription. We want no element of compulsion.

I will give way now to the Minister if he will give us an immediate assurance that there will be no element of compulsion at jobcentres, and that that will be written in black and white by tabling amendments immediately to the jobseekers regulations.

Mr. Soames: I regret that such an important debate should descend into such unbelievable unreality. This country does not have conscription. There will be no compulsion. The armed forces do not want to recruit anyone who would not come willingly into their ranks. The proposition advanced by the hon. Gentleman is so fatuous, so idiotic and so stupid that it almost defies imagination.

Dr. Reid: I shall give the Minister another opportunity. Will he guarantee that amendments to the jobseekers regulations will be placed before the House, exempting the armed forces from compulsion and removing the financial penalties of the regulations?

Mr. Soames: I have already made the point as clearly as I could. If the hon. Gentleman does not understand it, there is nothing that I can do to help him. There will be no such thing as any of the things that he has described.

Dr. Reid: I am surprised that the Minister is not prepared to say that he will exempt that. There are a list of exemptions under the regulations, including conscientious objectors, people who are disabled, jobs that are unsuitable. It would take five minutes to draft a regulation to exempt the armed forces from compulsion or to remove the financial penalties for any young man or woman who goes to a jobcentre. I am surprised that the Minister will not do that.

Dr. Godman: It find it difficult to believe that these Ministers are so incompetent. Surely the Department of Employment must have issued guidelines to the managers of all jobcentres to say that they can only advise youngsters of vacancies in the armed forces. My hon. Friend should ask the Minister to ensure that a copy of those guidelines are placed in the Library. I shall speak to the manager of my local jobcentre in the morning to tell him that he only advises youngsters of these vacancies.

Dr. Reid: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I shall be doing the same at my local jobcentre. There are some 161 clauses in the jobseekers regulations. I had hoped that the exemptions would be part of the regulations, but the Minister has declined to give us an assurance that amendments will be tabled.

The criticism and incoherence of what the Government have produced on defence over the past few years is a tragedy, because there could be agreement on both sides of the House on substantial issues, such as our commitment to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation as the cornerstone of our defence policy; the Western European Union being the European pillar; our approach, through intergovernmental means, to construct alliances abroad; and on joint activity with our allies and tri-service activity at home.

There is immense scope to build consensus in the House on central defence policy, but that will not occur if Ministers respond to criticisms that have been made

inside and outside the House merely by accusing those who make those criticisms of being ignorant, and claiming that Ministers are the font of all wisdom.

Lady Olga Maitland: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will deal with a point that Conservative Members have been waiting for; we have listened now for half an hour. What is the Labour party's position on the defence review that it announced it would launch should it ever become the party of government? Would his party not be struggling to fulfil the commitments it gave at six Labour party conferences, which committed it to reducing defence spending by £4 billion—which, frankly, would gut our security?

Dr. Reid: Cuts of that size would. That is why we have never accepted it. That is why we are equally surprised that the Government made a 30 per cent. cut. The Government have implemented Labour conference decisions that we have refused.

On a defence review, our position is well known. I need not rehearse the arguments again. The choice is whether to have change that is managed and coherent, or to have change that is done through a series of piecemeal reviews—"Options for Change", "Options for Change plus 1", defence cost studies and a sell-off of housing. A full defence review and managed change would give a strategic signpost five, 10 and 15 years down the road, which would give the stability to our armed forces that they have lacked over the past few years.

On the philosophy behind the Ministry of Defence's approach to defence planning, the Department has a growing obsession with markets. It is focusing on meeting cost targets rather than the purposes behind the use of military force.

On training, which the Minister mentioned, the Army Training Organisation is due to become an agency on 1 April 1996, under the control of the Adjutant General. The office of the Inspector General (Doctrine and Training) is to be broken up—a decision omitted from the defence estimates 1995. There is a risk that it reflects a diminished commitment to bringing together the formulation and articulation of land warfare doctrine and its importation into a system of all-arms collective training.

Similarly, the Secretary of State announced on 14 July, in a statement on the outcome of the defence costs study, that there would be an increase in collective Army training in Germany of between 50 and 100 per cent. as a result of additional funds that would be made available to purchase range time. The intention to increase the six weeks of battle group training has not been achieved. At a time when the defence budget is reduced, military readiness is relaxed. I hope that moneys for training will not be a soft target to provide financial savings.

With regard to personnel matters, which were not mentioned tonight, for all its limitations the average operational tour interval would first appear to be the most objective measure of the actual levels of commitment of a proportion of army units outside of using targets relating to operational and formation evaluations—OPEVAL/FORMEVAL. However, providing that measure does not enable us to analyse the relationship between the commitments and the resources of the Army or particular arms in the Army. An additional measure of performance is necessary as the Army continues to adjust to the effects of the defence costs study.

The MOD sets its agencies detailed targets for annual performance and measurements of the outcome. Notwithstanding publishing the OPEVAL/FORMEVAL statistics, to which I have referred, there is no reason why it should not do the same for the performance of the Army if the Department wishes to be true to value for money in real terms, which is operational effectiveness.

Questions of procurement will be handled by my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) when he replies, if he is lucky enough to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker. I merely say that there is increasing concern about slippage on equipment for the Army. The AS90 155mm howitzer had an original in-service date of August 1992, and the actual ISD is November 1993. An estimated over-cost of £33 million in a competitive contract is also illuminating.

The Bowman replacement combat radio system had an original in-service date of 1995. With a current ISD in 2000, Clansman is becoming increasingly vulnerable to electronic countermeasures, and lacks the data handling capacity to meet requirements for currently improved C^2I systems. In other words, slippage in the actual provision of resources to the armed forces has operational implications which go beyond just the lack of use of new equipment, as I mentioned in the case of the Bowman replacement.

Equipment availability in the Army, even where it has been purchased, is disturbing. It is easier to evaluate changes in the structural readiness of the Army than the operational readiness because of the ambiguity in measuring the training of personnel and the working order equipment. Clearly, less quantifiable factors require monitoring when forces are more likely to be used.

Unfortunately, the Defence Committee's report on the 1995 defence estimates acknowledged that availability statistics from the Army battlefield equipment reliability return were

"disturbing even when allowance is made for doubts about their accuracy and the methodology used."

Although the precise data are classified, the Chieftain, Challenger and Warrior, which were all mentioned by the Minister, and MLRS, as of November 1994, had availability figures of, in some cases, barely 50 per cent. So the resources that the Minister mentioned in his opening remarks are apparently available only half the time, despite the fact that their full ownership is ascribed to the Army.

Those are a number of the detailed areas. I am sensitive to the fact that Conservative Members seem to think that I was making a personal criticism of the Secretary of State. I was quoting others who were. Let me turn to my criticisms, because those who think that the Secretary of State has some malevolence towards the armed forces for personal reasons, or that these mistakes arise because he is not an able, articulate, organised type of chap, are sadly mistaken.

The differences between the Secretary of State and the armed forces have arisen because of the contradiction between a free market fetish, or a free market fan, on the one hand and, on the other, defence and the armed forces, which require planning, strategy and collective esprit de corps—the opposite of the individualism of the free market. That is the contradiction that lies at the bottom of

[Dr. Reid]

the terrible incompatibility between the Secretary of State and the armed forces, not the lack of any personal qualities on the right hon. Gentleman's part.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): I am rather surprised by the hon. Gentleman's last remark. I thought that the Labour party had now takenon and embraced the idea of the free market. Is he now saying that he has changed his mind again?

Dr. Reid: The hon. Gentleman obviously was not listening. I referred to a free market "fetish". The Opposition do not have a fetish for the free market, any more than we have a fetish for nationalisation. We believe in a balanced economy, in which the members of the armed forces are appreciated, and where the traditions, ethos, collective planning and strategy are compatible with the thinking and philosophy of the Secretary of State.

We all know that the past 10 years have been difficult for members of the British Army and their counterparts in the other two services. Their numbers have been slashed by a third, their financial resources have been cut by a third, and, at times, morale has been reduced to rock bottom. However justified may have been the reductions in expenditure, they have often been imposed during the past decade with a mind-blowing insensitivity and incoherence.

We should all be worried about the growing feeling that the armed forces and those who previously associated with them lack the respect and the understanding of some of their political masters. There is a growing awareness of a struggle within the MOD; it does not take a genius to recognise it.

In some quarters, there is a tendency to diminish the ethos and to underestimate the traditions and spirit of the armed forces; to pay insufficient attention to their attachment to heritage, architecture and symbolism. That is a tendency which is intrinsic to the values of the economic extremism of the free market right wing.

People of extremist free-market tendencies are not at ease with an institution such as the armed forces, which puts honour above price. They do not understand a code of conduct which puts the benefits of the collective above the advancement of the individual. They are ill at ease with the suggestion that self-seeking is not in itself meritorious, and they are alien to the concept of individual sacrifice for the advancement of the group. They have become desiccated calculating machines who know the value of nothing while pretending to know the price of everything.

Of course, they protest their virility from public platforms, waving toy guns. But away from conference platforms, when decisions are made, when they brand all public expenditure, including defence, as unproductive, when they display the mentality of the 18th-century liberals who thought that the worst form of public expenditure was expenditure on defence, they cannot hope to have a binding relationship between their philosophy and the institutions which fall under their control.

I do not blame the Secretary of State. He did not ask for the job. He is ill fitted politically, not personally, for it, and we all suffer for him. The Secretary of State, who sets the agenda for the Government on defence, is a man of that political philosophy. Thank heavens the day is not too far off when our armed forces will have a Government more attuned to their traditions and hopes.

5.57 pm

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): The House will have been disappointed that the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) lowered the tone of the debate which had been so robustly opened by hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces. I am afraid that the picture of gloom painted by the hon. Gentleman is simply not borne out by the facts. As the Chairman of the Defence Committee, I have visited many units around Britain—I dare say, rather more than he has. It has been clear to me that morale is extremely high.

There will always be a number of armchair generals and admirals prepared to fire broadsides and to criticise—that has always been the case—but the picture painted by the hon. Gentleman this afternoon is far removed from the truth. He had to resort to quoting from newspapers such as the *Daily Express*. If one wanted to be critical, one could say that that proves only that there is a shortage of good quotes for a debate such as this. I had hoped that, when he returned to his script, there would be an improvement in the hon. Gentleman's speech, but that was just wishful thinking.

My hon. Friend the Minister paid tribute to our armed forces in the implementation force in Bosnia and to the people who earlier served in former Yugoslavia in the United Nations protection force. I endorse everything that he said. The other day, the Select Committee on Defence took the opportunity to visit the 14th Armoured Division at Catterick. We saw there the forces of the Queen's Royal Hussars, who were preparing for a second trip to former Yugoslavia. I have seldom seen a unit better trained, better equipped and better led and with such high morale. We wish those soldiers well, pay tribute to the work that they have already done, and wish them a safe return to this country.

My hon. Friend did not pay tribute to non-service personnel in former Yugoslavia, who are doing so much work. From the Select Committee's visits to that region, it was clear that the Overseas Development Agency is doing great work on the infrastructure there. I pay tribute to the civilians who have been drivers and workers on the relief convoys carrying humanitarian aid to former Yugoslavia and, we must not forget, to the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson), who has spent much of his recess time taking humanitarian aid to that country.

Former Yugoslavia is a tragic example of the sort of overseas operation that our forces are likely to be involved in following the end of the cold war. There are going to be joint operations with other nations in peacemaking, peacekeeping and implementing United Nations Security Council resolutions in a much more disordered and unpredictable world. My hon. Friend the Minister is right to say that, in such circumstances, the Western European Union will have a role in determining formations in Europe, but that the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation will still remain the benchmark of this country's defences. I welcome what he said about the progress that is being made towards meeting the 24-month target for intervals between operational tours.

Four weeks after my hip replacement operation, my doctor says that I should not be here this evening, so I hope that hon. Members will understand if I am not in my

place for the winding-up speeches. I hasten to add that I shall read *Hansard* carefully to find out the Minister's replies to my questions. I am sorry only that the welcome decision to order 800 Land-Rover ambulances was not made in time for my rush to the House to vote on the common fisheries policy just before Christmas, four days after my operation. Perhaps with Corporal Coull to see me safely through the Christmas traffic, I would have managed it. The House enjoyed the Minister's story and I hope that he will be using his boxing gloves to good effect on future occasions.

The Land-Rover ambulance meets or exceeds all the Ministry of Defence's operational and medical requirements, the technical specification and the reliability targets and it is less expensive to buy or run than its Austrian rival. I hope that the MOD will use the private finance initiative leasing option on contract maintenance and guaranteed availability. The Land Rover will also save money through the commonality with the MOD's existing fleet, and benefit from a global support network. All in all, it is a good decision, not only for our armed forces, but for British industry.

The Land-Rover order demonstrates that, when the then Minister of State for Defence Procurement, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman), told the Joint Defence and Trade and Industry inquiry that, in making procurement decisions, Ministers would carefully consider the impact on our long-term defence industrial base and on jobs, he meant what he said. That is why I want to comment on the industries that equip our soldiers. That Joint Committee inquiry was only the second time that departmental Committees had co-operated in such a way.

The inquiry was prompted by concerns about the United Kingdom's defence industries. They involved declining spending on defence equipment, fiercer international competition and the MOD's efforts to obtain greater value for money. The Joint Committee's view was that, for both defence and industrial reasons, the defence industries have a distinctive importance that justifies Governments looking beyond short-term, value-for-money considerations in procurement. In particular, they form a high-technology and high value-added sector with major influence on other parts of UK industry through the transfer of skills and technology.

Our report had three major sections: rationalisation and collaboration, research and development, and technology acquisition and procurement. Collaboration with United States companies remains important, but we considered that greater European collaboration was crucial.

The UK Government take a prominent role in creating a European defence market and the Committee welcomed that. Many defence projects are collaborative. In the White Paper on the defence estimates, there were plenty of examples of that. This country is collaborating with more than 15 other countries on joint projects. France is in the lead: it has 25 joint projects with the UK; Germany has 22 and the United States has 19.

The United States remains our principal rival in defence production and sales, but it is still an important partner and an important market for British defence industries. It is significant that, in 1979, when the Conservatives came to power, the so-called two-way street of reciprocal sales and purchases of defence products across the north Atlantic had a ratio of 10:1 in favour of the United States. That is down to a ratio of only 2:1, which is a tremendous improvement, but the Government should double their efforts in trying to gain fairer access to United States markets for our defence products.

Our Committee emphasised the importance of research and development to the long-term future of the defence industries. Our main recommendation was for an R and D strategy extending beyond Government-funded R and D and co-ordinated by the MOD. Its aims would be to fill gaps in R and D in critical sectors, prevent duplication of effort, to disseminate the results of research to where they are most useful, to co-ordinate defence and civil R and D where worth while, and to maximise the benefits from international collaboration. We also recommended that the MOD be given a more formal responsibility to take account of the future of the UK's defence industries, and to maximise their contribution to the UK's technology and skills base.

Essentially, that industry involves leading-edge technology. It supports some 315,000 jobs, specifically in defence-related manufacturing, and makes more than £5 billion worth of exports a year. The position needs careful monitoring because this nation must never risk being held to ransom by foreign equipment suppliers in times of crisis. Our defence industrial base is therefore a crucial part of the country's defence needs and strategy.

Recruitment has been mentioned in earlier speeches. The Defence Select Committee is in the middle of an inquiry into manning and recruitment, but two questions have arisen, on which I would welcome the Minister's comments. With Army recruitment having fallen by some 5,000 in the past three years, is this the right time to close 133 recruiting offices and to hand over the task of recruiting to the 1,100 jobcentres? I want to be reassured that the jobcentres are ready to assume their new task. Why does the available research suggest that applications to join the Army have fallen by some 50 per cent. in the areas concerned?

My second question about recruitment relates to press reports about the Home Secretary's plan to reintroduce the so-called boot camps for young offenders. Is it not just possible that young offenders who are sent to boot camps rather than prison, given a short back and sides, clothed, well fed, housed, trained and able to enjoy sport and recreation, will conclude that more of the same—along with pay, and the very interesting job of a soldier—is better than returning to a life of crime and the dole? Is my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces reviewing the criteria for recruits to allow those who have been convicted of criminal offences—particularly young people—to be considered more favourably for membership of the armed forces?

Sir Jim Spicer: We hope that the airborne initiative, which has been so successful in Scotland, will be extended to the rest of the United Kingdom. It deals not with convicted young people, but with young people who are at risk, giving them a genuine start in life—not training them for the armed forces or running a boot camp, but combining employment opportunity with the guarantee of a job in local industry at the end of a 10-week course.

Mr. Colvin: Indeed: I have seen for myself what my hon. Friend has described.

[Mr. Colvin]

The last matter that I wish to raise has been given considerable publicity during the past week. I refer to the so-called—I use the phrase advisedly—Gulf war syndrome. Our Committee reported on 7 November. Our report did not try to prove or disprove the existence of the syndrome, acknowledging that much more research was needed. I know that the Ministry of Defence is currently conducting investigations, and I applaud the fact that, according to my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, it is taking the matter seriously. I feel, however, that the Committee's recommendation of a full epidemiological survey should receive a positive response.

At present, we are debating the issue in the dark, because no one knows for certain whether the so-called syndrome exists. Let me put the matter into perspective. Of the 51,000 British personnel who served in the Gulf, about 1 per cent.—550—have reported symptoms; I have been told over the past week or so that the number has now risen to about 700, and this morning, during a radio discussion, someone who is suffering from symptoms of the so-called syndrome said that some 3,000 people were affected. That is a worrying development. It seems that we are beginning to copy what is happening in the United States of America, a country that thrives on litigation. There are too many cases of "no pay, no fee", with solicitors trying to persuade people to have a go at securing compensation. We must avoid that at all costs.

Many figures have been bandied about in regard to epidemiological surveys. The *Sunday Times* spoke of a cost of £500,000, and of such surveys taking two or three years to complete, but I am assured by the medical research unit of Southampton university's epidemiology department that they could be carried out at a cost of about £100,000, and would take about a year to complete. That would mean surveying 10 per cent. of service personnel who went to the Gulf—about 5,000—and some civilians, along with another 5,000 who stayed here. Until that has been done, we shall not know whether the percentage who have reported symptoms are representative, or whether there is any real comparison to be made between those who went to the Gulf and those who did not.

Our Committee applauded the MOD's establishment of a medical assessment programme, but felt that it should be given more resources. I believe that 330 service personnel have been assessed so far, out of some 700 who have reported symptoms. I am, however, worried by reports from some units of officers being unnecessarily heavy-handed with people who have expressed a wish to be assessed. Now people feel that they may be putting their jobs at risk if they ask for an assessment. I want to be certain that everyone who is experiencing symptoms can be assessed, and that proper expenses are paid to enable such people to travel to Raughton, which may be a long way from where they are stationed. Alternatively, proper facilities should be laid on in NHS hospitals.

We should compare what is happening here with what is happening in two other countries that participated in the Gulf operations. In the United States, a third of 323,000 Gulf war veterans who have left the service since the Gulf war are now receiving treatment, and are involved in the US assessment programme. In France—significantly—there have been no reports of so-called Gulf war syndrome. None of the French troops were given the multiple vaccinations that were given to our troops and those of the Americans. More work must be done on that, and comprehensive research must be done on the long-term effect of the combination of drugs that were used in the Gulf.

There must also be a full exchange of information with our coalition partners. We must accept that, in future, the risk of warfare and attacks on our country will involve chemical and biological weapons much more than nuclear ones. That will be taken into account in military training and practice, and we need more information about it.

During the past week, worrying evidence has been published about the genetic effects of the Gulf war on the children of veterans. Some 52 cases have been identified so far. I am aware that between 1 and 2 per cent. of children born in this country suffer from abnormalities or malformations, but I think that we must put such reports into perspective. That would be done by the epidemiological study for which I have asked. Surely we owe it to people who risked their lives defending freedom in the Gulf to establish the facts, to ensure that free treatment is available to all and to pay compensation if and when it is due.

Following the collapse of the iron curtain and the end of the cold war, in common with all NATO and former Warsaw pact countries, we have used the peace dividend to reduce defence expenditure—although, in cash terms, it has stayed about the same at around £22 billion a year. Our armed forces have had to undergo a period of difficult adjustment, but I am glad that they can now enjoy a period of stability, with a more efficient support structure, thanks to "Front Line First". The one thing that they do not want, which has—luckily—not been referred to, is another full-scale defence review.

6.19 pm

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), because I echo much of what he said, especially that concerning the relationship between defence contracts and the health of British manufacturing and the recent experiences regarding contracts for military ambulances and other vehicles, and Land-Rover. I certainly echo his welcome for the decision to award the contracts for the 8,000 light and medium vehicles and the 800 military ambulances to Land-Rover. I should like to focus on the contract for the ambulances.

I suppose that I have to declare a number of interests. First, I declare a formal interest in that I am a member of the Transport and General Workers Union parliamentary panel. There is no doubt at all that many T and G members' jobs would have been affected by the success or otherwise of the contract. I also declare a much broader interest, shared by hon. Members on both sides of the House, because I represent a constituency in the midlands.

There is no doubt about the importance of manufacturing to the midlands. The automotive industry is particularly vital to the success of the economy in the midlands. The Rover group is certainly important. Indeed, the Longbridge plant is in my constituency. Behind the big manufacturers, however, there is a network of component suppliers all the way down the supply chain for whom a healthy automotive industry and a healthy manufacturing industry in general is so vital. There is no

doubt that manufacturing made the midlands, and unless it remains healthy, the midlands will not make it.

That is why so many of us have been disappointed by events over the past 15 or 16 years, which have caused the region's manufacturing base to suffer. Of course not only the midlands is important to the industry. The conversion of the Land Rover for ambulance purposes is carried out by Marshalls of Cambridge, an important specialist conversion firm. The Land-Rover deal is vital to British exports. Land-Rover is doing very well in its export performance in military and civil spheres. I welcome the announcement made earlier in the week of a new contract to supply Land Rovers to the Italian military.

Awarding the contract for our ambulances to a firm based overseas would have sent out some very strange signals. It is not that there is anything wrong with the quality of the Land Rover. It met all the specifications required by the Ministry of Defence, including its competitive price. Considering that the Government have been saying—apparently—how important it is to promote British exports and British industry overseas, it would have looked very odd if we had looked elsewhere when it came to awarding contracts which were vital to Britain's industrial and defence interests. Such action would also have been very strange since the Secretary of State for Defence showed his willingness at the Conservative party conference to wrap himself in the Union Jack, which to many was somewhat distasteful.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I am delighted by what the hon. Gentleman has said. Will he reassure me that his local authority does not buy any foreign vehicles, and that his ambulance trust has no Renault or Mercedes ambulances?

Mr. Burden: I cannot answer for my local ambulance trust, because—unfortunately—like many trusts it is not accountable. To my knowledge the trust does not have foreign ambulances, but the hon. Gentleman should not take that as gospel. The trust is not as accountable as it needs to be. With regard to the local authority, I am pleased to be able to report that, when Leyland Daf was under great threat a little while ago, it was one of the bodies most active in supporting and promoting the existence of a healthy van industry in the midlands and the country.

It would have been odd had the Secretary of State continued with the Viennese waltz, but I am pleased that he did not and the contract was awarded to Land-Rover. It is important that credit is paid not only to Land-Rover and Marshall but to all the people, as well as hon. Members on both sides of the House, who worked so hard to ensure that all the factors were taken into account and that the final decision went the way that it did.

It is clear that the Ministry of Defence is entitled to expect the highest quality products from its suppliers. It is also clear that the Ministry of Defence has to recognise the strategic importance of British manufacturing to the health of our economy. That is why it is important to learn the lessons from the story of the awarding of the contract. We should be looking for more pro-activity from Ministers.

While looking back over similar circumstances that have arisen, I was struck by an article in the June 1994 edition of the *International Defence Newsletter*. It is quite topical in that it describes events as far back as the 1970s, as well as those more up to date. It says:

"In the late 1970s a military requirement was recognised for a lightweight 2 tonne military vehicle with excellent cross country capability including the ability to carry a variety of weapons systems."

I commend to hon. Members on both sides of the House the extremely instructive story told in the article. The procurement process in the United Kingdom was a catalogue of muddle and procrastination, but resulted in a vehicle being chosen in 1990. The article went on:

"Almost immediately the specification was changed to a new manual gear box and production delayed. From its very inception the old ghosts of Larkhill came back to haunt the vehicle. The Army were not at all happy with the performance of the vehicle and the order was reduced to fulfil the light gun tractor and Vixen radio vehicles only. Problems continued until two vehicles collided at Larkhill following brake failure. Now reports are coming in from Bosnia of vehicles having brake failure following the fitting of snow chains, in one case demolishing a house. The whole fleet is believed to have been withdrawn from service again and the Army is left to fall back on their one tonne Land Rovers which are now 26 years old."

Admittedly, that report is about 18 months old, but it is instructive in the light of recent events. Its point is to contrast the catalogue of muddle in the UK with the experience elsewhere.

Around the same time, a similar need was identified in the Australian Army. The conclusion drawn by the article about the process in Australia was:

"The Australian experience is a prime example of a contract driven by the needs of the user and staged upgrades introduced during the process of evaluation where new variants and derivatives are developed following operational experience."

The conclusion is that in Australia—what singularly failed to happen here with regard to the order that I have described—there was planning, partnership and long-term commitment. Even though things have moved on since that catalogue of muddle between the 1970s and 1990, some of the problems remain.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. James Arbuthnot): That is why we were most fortunate to be able to recruit the Australian, Sir Malcolm McIntosh, as chief of defence procurement.

Mr. Burden: As I have said, I think that things have improved somewhat, but there is still room for improvement. The Minister was complimented earlier in the debate on his courtesy during the negotiations at Land-Rover, and I heartily endorse the compliment. When I and my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) went to see the Minister about this issue, nobody could fault his courtesy, and he listened to everything that we had to say.

During the discussions about the order—which have taken the best part of a year now—many of the actors who were crucially involved found it difficult to obtain information on exactly what problems were identified. I accept that Ministers are in a difficult position when engaged in a competitive process—there is no doubt about that. However, a balance must be struck between respecting commercial confidences and going into a defence contract budget purdah, in which it is difficult to

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[Mr. Burden]

obtain vital information that could help to identify and iron out problems at a much earlier stage than happened in this case.

In addition to celebrating the award of the contract to Land-Rover, its export performance and the deal with the Italian army, it is important that we learn some lessons from the experience. There are three principal lessons to which I should like to draw the attention of hon. Members.

The first lesson—again echoing something said by the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside—is the need to break down departmentalism. If it is possible for the Defence Select Committee and the Trade and Industry Select Committee to pool their resources and look at Britain's defence and industrial needs and produce a joint report, much more could be done to break down departmentalism in Government. I hope that some further work will be done on that. If there had been a little more co-ordination and co-operation, not only in this affair but generally, we could have avoided some of the problems that we have identified.

Secondly—again echoing what was said by the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside—we need a far longer-term view of our industrial needs and their relationship to defence contracts and defence procurement.

Thirdly, we need a much more pro-active partnership between Government and industry that recognises that the Ministry of Defence has an absolute right to expect high quality but also recognises that the Government have a responsibility to British industry, its promotion abroad and for the safeguarding of jobs in the UK.

As we celebrate Land-Rover's success and congratulate everyone who has made it possible, I hope that we will learn those lessons and, in future, that some changes will be made which will enable us to avoid the problems that we have seen perhaps a little too often during the past year or so.

6.32 pm

Sir Archibald Hamilton (Epsom and Ewell): I declare an interest. I work for Litton, which is an American defence contractor, and W. S. Atkins, which does a certain amount of contracting work for the Ministry of Defence. I shall not, however, be making any reference to procurement during my remarks.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), I was disappointed by the speech of the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid), and I am sorry that he did not find it possible to stay with us for a little longer. When I was a Defence Minister, he used to make rather witty, pungent and significant speeches. I thought then that it was rather surprising that he was not shadowing the Secretary of State for Defence because he seemed to have a lot going for him.

I must say that, after today's contribution—the personal abuse and inaccurate accusations against people—the Labour party has made a sensible decision to keep him in a much more junior post on its Front Bench. It is not good enough to hide behind articles in the *Daily Express* and letters from retired officers to try to put over views and then to say that they are nothing to do with him.

I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is not here, but I should tell him that there have always been complaints from retired officers. That has happened over the years, even when there were 3 per cent. real-terms increases—which our Government inherited from the Callaghan Government in 1979 and ran on to 1983-84. Even during that time some retired officers complained about the way things were done in the Ministry of Defence.

One of the great triumphs of the national health service is that people live much longer than they did before, and that applies to retired generals. As time passes, they get memory lapses about what happened when they had to wrestle with all those problems. It may be something to do with the great effectiveness of the NHS that we continue to receive large numbers of letters from retired officers who seem to see things in much starker and black and white terms than the shades of grey that they probably had to wrestle with during their time in charge.

It is amazing that the Labour party continues the farce of hiding behind a defence review. I wonder how much longer that will go on. It is a charade and an excuse to produce no policies on defence between now and the general election. I am not sure that it will be possible to go on fooling the British people for that long. Eventually it will have to harden up a bit on all this.

I am glad to see that the hon. Member for Motherwell, North is back in his seat. I made a number of remarks about him which, I am afraid, he will now have to read in the *Official Report*. It is sad that he had to leave so quickly after his contribution. I should like to apologise to my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, because I will not be here for his closing remarks as I have engagements later on.

I join my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces in the warm tributes that he paid to our troops in Bosnia. That tribute applies to the tasks that they have been asked to undertake in the past rather than what they will have to do in the future. There was no doubt that the UN resolution for them to protect safe areas in Bosnia, when they had neither the equipment nor numbers with which to do it, was extremely arduous. In the circumstances, they did a fantastic and noble job. It seems that, with the much larger forces in Bosnia and the agreement with the warring parties, the role that they now have is much more sustainable than it has been in the past.

I am extremely encouraged that our troops have been occupying many of the sites and bits of high ground in Bosnia that were previously occupied by artillery formations of the warring factions. That means that the job they are being asked to do is one that they will be able to perform, and that they should, as a result, be in much less danger than they have been. That is enormously encouraging. We must hope that the peace agreements last and that more permanent arrangements can be made within the 12 months that I know everyone wants the mission to last. We must keep our fingers crossed.

Now that we have a massive NATO deployment in Bosnia, we will have many of the advantages of US technology with the United States troops there. At the same time, the United Kingdom brings the greatest expertise in peacekeeping. That is a result of what we have learnt and achieved in Northern Ireland. I think that there is certainly something that we can teach the Americans in that area, and I suspect that they will be quite grateful to learn because peacekeeping may be what will be happening more in the future.

Some of my military contacts—unlike the hon. Member for Motherwell, North, I will not mention who they are—are quite concerned that, if we do too much peacekeeping, we will run the risk of some of our soldiers losing the ability to fight. We must remember that armies are there to fight. They are not there to stand around like policemen, trying to keep warring factions apart. There is obviously a risk of degradation in their capabilities if they are to be involved in peacekeeping the whole time.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces mentioned the lack of volunteers. When I was in the Ministry of Defence, I took the view that as long as our main commitment for the Army was Northern Ireland, there did not seem to be a role for Gurkhas. As they were unable to speak good English and were a different colour from everyone else, they would have found it extremely dangerous and difficult to carry out tasks in Northern Ireland. However, if the Army continues to be involved in peacekeeping abroad and we are running short of volunteers from Britain, there might be a bigger role for the Gurkhas. I am encouraged that they have been used to reinforce certain units, but perhaps we could go further and salvage one or two battalions of Gurkhas who could effectively carry out peacekeeping tasks.

Changes have been made to ensure that the Gurkhas all speak English, and that is a critical element in making them more effective. The nostalgic tradition that all British officers learnt Gurkhali and spoke to them in their native language was not helpful to the Gurkhas, who need to speak an international language and communicate with others. If they are to have a role in the British Army, it is important for them to speak English. It might be possible to reconsider the future of the Gurkhas if we continue to be involved in peacekeeping abroad.

The United States continues to have a significant role in the deployment to Bosnia. That is important move as it cements the United States into European defence. Our European partners talk about European defence, which normally means the future of European politics rather than anything to do with defence. I am extremely worried about the underlying motives of the French when they talk about European defence structures, which are often used to squeeze the Americans out of any commitment to defence in Europe. That carries the most enormous dangers.

The Gulf war demonstrated the vast technological capability of the United States which is not matched anywhere in the world, and to divorce ourselves from that defence capability strikes me as absolute madness.

The United States is one of the few countries with an Executive system that enables it to take the decision to go to war. We know that there are large numbers of historical reasons for the construction of political systems in Europe, but there is no doubt that coalition Governments find it extremely difficult to take a decision to go to war. To cut ourselves off from the United States, with its technological superiority and a political system that enables it to take difficult decisions strikes me as absolute madness. The deployment to Bosnia is doing a tremendous amount to ensure that the United States plays a role in European defence for many years to come and that is an extremely satisfactory outcome.

Finally, I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to our armed forces. Like him, I believe that they are the finest troops in the world and we have every reason to be extremely proud of them. They are a great institution, and I give them all my support.

6.43 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): There is now less heat in the debate than there was earlier, but perhaps there is a little more light. The last two or three speeches focused on more practical day-to-day issues concerning the Army that certainly should be included in the debate. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) is no longer in the Chamber. I wanted to welcome him back after his successful operation and commend him as a most distinguished successor Chairman of the Defence Committee.

As the then Secretary of State, now the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, said when the defence costs study was first placed before the House, it was entirely different from previous reviews because its aim was to cut costs, not defence, and cuts in the front line were not acceptable. I am willing to accept that that was the intention of that exercise, but I am well aware of the logical fallacy of post hoc, ergo propter hoc. Since the defence study review, the Army has operated undermanned battalions and it now has a shortfall that is estimated at between 5,000 and 7,000.

Like others, I am well aware of the failings of retired senior officers, although I have to declare an interest in respect of Lieutenant-General Sir David Young, as he is a personal friend. He is a most distinguished soldier, who began his career in the emergency in Malaya and finished it as Captain Commandant of the Ulster Defence Regiment in Northern Ireland.

People who give up an activity in which they have been intensively involved tend to take into retirement a fairly strong view as to precisely how that activity should be managed. I can think of at least one activity that I have given up on which I consider myself the world's greatest living expert, although 99 per cent. of the population might take an entirely different view.

Having entered those qualifications, I have to say that, when senior officers feel compelled to go public, we should take account of the fact that they were compelled to go into print—that in itself must have some significance—although we should not accept that everything they say is exactly correct. Their comments often reveal the resonance in regiments—particularly when they have been closely associated with those regiments—of the feeling at the time and the response to change.

In civilian life, cuts in expenditure or the announcement of redundancies undoubtedly undermine morale. It would be curious if it were different in the armed services. I do not believe that morale is at rock bottom but, like others who have talked to senior commanders, I have been told that morale is fragile. The House and the Government should be concerned to improve it.

Much has been made on this and previous occasions of the now famous speech by the Secretary of State for Defence at Blackpool in October. I suspect that his reception might have been different if he had told the audience that there was likely to be a real-terms cut in the defence budget in the forthcoming year and the year after.

[Mr. Menzies Campbell]

As I have declared in the House on many occasions, we have now reached the stage at which the House should say on an all-party non-partisan basis that we do not believe that there should be any further material cut in the defence budget in the foreseeable future.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Did the hon. and learned Gentleman say that to his party conference?

Mr. Campbell: Not only did I say that to my conference, but I had its unanimous endorsement on the point. I suspect that such a commitment would do a great deal to buttress fragile morale in certain parts of the armed services.

I do not share precisely the same views as the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Sir A. Hamilton) on Europe, but I agree with other parts of his speech. The Defence Committee and the Trade and Industry Committee joint report calls for greater co-operation in defence procurement in Europe. I strongly believe that we must maintain a European base for defence technology and prevent the domination—I accept that that is a pejorative word—by American companies such as Lockheed and McDonnell-Douglas.

Some interesting developments have arisen from the efforts of some countries, which were previously members of the Warsaw pact, to join NATO. Some have found a steady procession of arms and equipment manufacturers at their front doors, saying, "You're a former member of the Warsaw pact and you're now anxious to join NATO. Has it occurred to you that if, for example, you bought the F16 aircraft, inter-operability would not be an issue?"

There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that some American companies have been arguing vociferously that only if they buy American equipment will such countries be capable of fulfilling the requirements for becoming a member of NATO. Perhaps that is a measure of free market economics, but it is also a measure of the efforts that American companies are willing to make.

It is right to maintain a leading edge in critical technologies on a European basis, using collaboration with our European partners if necessary. Indeed, paragraph 26 of the joint report states that European collaboration is

"crucial to the survival of the defence industries of the UK and other European countries."

Maintenance of the technology base of the UK defence industries should be a priority. I do not shrink from the observation that consideration of that factor should be built into the procurement process from the initial stages right through to the decision to order equipment.

If I was making this speech on Capitol hill or arguing this case before an American audience, I suspect that I would have a ready response. The extent to which the United States Defense Department is open to ordering equipment from countries other than the United States is extremely limited and it is, effectively, practised only in relation to equipment from areas which the US cannot usefully produce itself.

A common foreign and security policy will evolve in Europe. It will be driven by economic as much as political means. At best static—and more likely reducing—defence budgets will drive forward such issues as joint procurement and force specialisation as the only reasonable ways to meet the cost of advancing technology and to continue to provide a range of capability sufficient to meet all requirements.

It is worth reminding the House and the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell that, when President Clinton came to the NATO summit approximately two years ago, he agreed to the notion of combined joint task forces—occasions on which the European members of NATO might feel compelled to embark on an operation of some sort in which the United States did not want to join and that, for such operations, European members of NATO would be entitled to look to the whole assets of NATO.

A European defence identity is not inconsistent with NATO or, indeed, with a continued transatlantic relationship. There are on Capitol hill many legislators who argue strongly that the strength of that relationship will depend on the extent to which Europe is willing to do more in its own defence.

I must deal with some issues that apply directly to the Army. At the outset, the Minister gave us an interesting piece of statistical information. If I noted him correctly, he said that we need to recruit about 15,000 men and women annually, which is a considerable number. One of the difficulties, to which hon. Members have not referred in the debate, is that the physical standard of recruits is often rather less than what is desired. To put it bluntly, young people are not as physically fit as once they were. It is said that some have never worn anything other than training shoes and, as a result, cannot make the transition to boots; some are pretty unfit.

If we have to meet a target of 15,000, implicit in that target is finding 15,000 people who are fit and capable of accepting the training and fulfilling the job once introduced into the armed services—the Army in this case. That is an additional obstacle that recruitment must overcome.

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman for taking up that point and acknowledging that daunting target. He is right—the physical fitness side is a source of anxiety to us. The other great difficulty is the fact that many more young people are staying in further and higher education—it used to be one in nine, and now it is one in three. We are automatically fishing, within a certain age group, in a substantially reduced pool. We shall have to direct our attention—and are directing it—to getting round that problem, and we shall have to direct our recruitment towards slightly older people.

Mr. Campbell: That intervention serves to emphasise the fact that the problem cannot be analysed on the basis of numbers alone. There is a qualitative element, which has to be analysed carefully and given such weight as it requires.

There is another problem, particularly with the infantry. Because they are required in Ireland and Bosnia and for public duties, the burdens on infantry men and infantry women—if that is the right way to describe them—are in some respects disproportionately greater than those on other units.

If there are shortages, the men and women who are left behind might consider themselves to be overworked and, as they would see it, not properly rewarded for the extra

demands on their time. To deal with that problem, we must deal not only with recruitment, but with retention. I cannot help thinking that we sometimes divide recruitment and retention as if they were two separate issues, but I am sure that they are two sides of the same coin. The greater the problem of retention, the greater will be the demands for recruitment.

The tours of duty that people are asked to undertake are often pretty disruptive. I have heard an allegation—I do not know whether it is founded on fact or purely anecdotal—that, in four years, a 26-year-old captain had six weeks at home. That may or may not be true, but we all know that it has not yet been possible to meet the 24-month target. That target has lain at the heart of the policy of the Ministry of Defence for some considerable time. If it is not being met, we can all understand the disruption that results to the personal and family lives of those involved.

One important influence when men and, increasingly, women decide to stay in the armed services is the extent to which they can look to their families for support. If families feel that the individual in the armed services is away from home for a long time, there is bound to be a more difficult atmosphere if he or she considers signing up for a further period of service.

No one has referred to homosexuality in the armed services, but the issue should be drawn to the attention of the House. In due course, we are to be told the results of the Ministry of Defence survey, which are clearly not available today or we should have heard them from the Government.

For my part, I believe that it is a fundamental issue of human rights. There is no justification for discrimination on the grounds of sexuality. I appreciate that that is not a popular view in many parts of the Ministry of Defence, particularly at the level of senior commander, but those who are so opposed will have to recognise—in due course, if not immediately—that public attitudes to such matters have changed and that the special circumstances that they argue for with regard to the armed services are increasingly difficult to justify.

Racial harassment is an extremely difficult topic. We know that only 1.4 per cent. of those in the armed services come from black or Asian ethnic minorities. I do not suggest that there is a direct correlation between those numbers and the issue of racial harassment, but there are from time to time some unpleasant reports in the tabloid newspapers and elsewhere in which unpleasant allegations are made of racial harassment in the armed services. I have often heard the Minister at the Dispatch Box pledge himself and all of those for whom he is responsible to do everything in their power to eradicate and prevent harassment. I believe that the issue is of greater substance than ever surfaces into public consciousness. There is no place for racial harassment in a civilised society, and there is certainly no place for it in the armed services of the United Kingdom.

On the matter of increasing opportunities for women in the armed services—and, in particular, the Army—I asked a number of questions recently about the sexual harassment of women. I was somewhat taken aback to discover that no central record of such harassment is kept by the Ministry of Defence, although I believe that it is proposed to draw up a system to maintain such records. If there are to be more opportunities for women in the armed services, it would be quite foolish to ignore the possibility of increased sexual harassment. It would be foolish indeed not to take steps designed, first, to deal with those guilty of harassment quickly, effectively and efficiently and, secondly, to create an atmosphere and culture in which sexual harassment is regarded as wholly unacceptable.

There should be increasing opportunities for women in the armed services, although I know that there is a great debate about the extent to which women can be used in combat roles. I recall being driven in an armoured vehicle around the streets of Northern Ireland with the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) by an extremely competent 22-year-old female driver. If women are capable of being deployed in such circumstances—where a substantial element of risk is involved—there may be other circumstances in which they can play a fuller part in the Army than they have previously been allowed.

I accept that there are physical differences between men and women, but in terms of application and aptitude, many women are just as well qualified—if not better qualified—than men. If we are facing a recruitment problem, it would be foolish not to take the opportunity to utilise a resource in the form of the increased use of women in the armed services. That might go a long way towards remedying the difficulties created by the shortage to which I have referred.

Mr. Soames: The hon. and learned Gentleman will know that there is no obduracy or lack of desire on the Government's part to see more women filling more jobs in the armed forces. A week ago, I visited the great explosives experts at 33 Engineer Regiment, which is sending a troop off to Bosnia under the command of an extremely bright woman officer. The problem is not obduracy or a lack of desire to fill posts—we are happy to do that—but there must be a sensible cut-off point between areas in which women can satisfactorily undertake duties and areas in which it is impossible for them to be deployed. For example, it would be impossible for women to be deployed in tanks in the Royal Armoured Corps—it simply would not work—but there is no obduracy on our part with regard to pressing ahead with the programme, for the very reason to which the hon. and learned Gentleman referred.

Mr. Campbell: I am grateful to the Minister for that intervention. I apprehend from the way in which he approached the topic that he agrees that this is an area in which, by a more sensitive approach, we might be able to deal with the shortage.

I do not want to say much about the reserve forces, because the Reserve Forces Bill has begun its life in another place and, in due course, will come to this House. It is worth recalling, however, that 1,774 reservists were called out or recalled in support of the United Kingdom forces during the Gulf war. This week marks the fifth anniversary of the commencement of the Gulf war, and it is worth pointing out how effective the contribution of the reserves was. As our armed forces are pared to the bone to meet the financial demands to which I referred, there is likely to be an increasing role for reservists, particularly those with specialist skills.

I support what the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside said about a commitment to a full

[Mr. Campbell]

epidemiological survey of those who claim to be suffering from what has come to be called Gulf war syndrome as a result of serving in the Gulf. I do not know whether there is a Gulf war syndrome, but I certainly know that several hundred people who served in the Gulf now have a very debilitating illness. I am not qualified to say whether their service was the cause of that illness, but they are entitled to a high-quality investigation to seek to establish whether their claim can be properly evaluated.

I shall finish by saying a word or two about Bosnia. The Minister paid generous tributes to General Sir Michael Rose and to General Sir Rupert Smith. They were different characters, who interpreted and implemented their responsibilities in different ways, reflecting that substantial difference in character. I think that hardly anyone in Britain would not be able to recognise General Sir Michael Rose, whereas I suspect General Sir Rupert Smith could walk down Oxford street and never be recognised. I do not mean that either fulfilled his obligations in a less or more efficient way than the other, but they certainly had different approaches to their problems.

Both men deserve a generous tribute from the House of Commons, because they did not always receive the recognition that they deserved. In particular, General Rose was treated disgracefully by a number of American-based columnists, who rarely ventured beyond Washington or New York but who, from that rather safe distance, felt able to make pronouncements about the conduct of affairs by the UN in Bosnia. On occasion, those columnists—entirely without justification—were extremely critical of General Rose.

Now that there is a different operation in former Yugoslavia, it is our duty to be steadfast in support of the operations. I would go so far as to say that it is vital that the operations succeed. There is a clear difference between peacekeeping and peace enforcement, and the deployment of NATO forces—a considerable and, I think, almost unqualified success—demonstrates that, in the circumstances, enforcement is undoubtedly the only doctrine to adopt.

We should be unwilling to allow ourselves to be seduced into the view—often expressed by columnists who never went to Yugoslavia to see the extent of the UN effort—that the UN effort was a failure. Lives were saved, mouths were fed, utilities were made to function and, to put it bluntly, people were kept alive as a result of the efforts of the UN forces, including those from the United Kingdom.

We should ask ourselves how much more could have been done by the UN forces if they had had better resources, funding, intelligence and political direction; the failures in former Yugoslavia were not military, but political. They were failures based on Security Council resolutions, each of which was a masterpiece of ambiguity. They were failures caused by a lack of proper and effective political direction in Yugoslavia from United Nations officials charged with that responsibility. They were failures dictated by a ludicrous lack of resources for the objectives that the United Nations had been given.

The declaration that certain areas were to be "safe areas" has been mentioned. I supported that declaration, but it was rendered virtually meaningless by the absence of adequate resources to make and keep safe areas safe.

Which is likely to be more effective: a patrol of two Warrior fighting vehicles painted white, with the United Nations logo on one side, or what is now seen typically—a squadron of Challenger tanks with immediately available close air support, backed up if necessary by 155 mm howitzers? We have only to state the proposition of resources and effectiveness to realise the extent to which our forces, and other UN forces in former Yugoslavia, were operating, if not with their hands tied behind their backs, at least without the necessary tools and resources for the job that they were asked to do.

A matter that has concerned me is the NATO forces' attitude to war crimes and war criminals. I accept that NATO forces are not in former Yugoslavia to act as the investigating arm of the war crimes tribunal established at The Hague. I understand that the terms of the Dayton accords lay paramount obligations and responsibilities on those forces, but if it becomes obvious that evidence that might lead to allegations or prove that war crimes have been committed is being concealed, it should be within NATO forces' responsibility to try to secure that evidence, so that it can, if necessary, be made available to the investigators.

I appreciate that it is a question of balance. One can hardly expect NATO forces to go looking for such instances. If they did, they might spend a substantial amount of their time not only looking, but finding; but when such evidence is available, and when there is a risk of its being destroyed, the British public and international public opinion would be surprised if NATO forces did not take steps to preserve it.

Dr. Godman: I appreciate the difficulties of gathering evidence required by a tribunal, but might not a group of special investigation branch officers and military policemen from the NATO forces being brought together and given that task be the way to gather the evidence needed?

Mr. Campbell: I yield to the hon. Gentleman's undoubted expertise and experience in that matter. His service as a military policeman has been referred to. He suggests one way in which to deal with the problem; I am anxious only to establish the principle that NATO will not ignore such efforts and that, if such efforts are made, it will do all it can to assist.

As has been said by politicians of all the three major parties at various stages since 1992, all the armed services need a period of consolidation. Those who risk their lives for us deserve clear political guidance and sufficient military and financial resources.

Some people question the value and utility of these single-service debates. I still believe that they have a proper place in the parliamentary calendar as they allow us not only to question Ministers and hear the Government's policy but, once again, to emphasise the important place that the armed services occupy in the life of the United Kingdom.

7.14 pm

Mr. Neville Trotter (Tynemouth): I refer to a letter written to me just before Christmas by Trevor Minter, who commands the first battalion of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, which has strong links with the north-east—it is based at Catterick—and is currently serving in Bosnia.

Colonel Minter writes that it has now completed half of its tour and says that it

"is in good heart and enjoying the challenge of contributing to peace in this turbulent land."

He refers to one company that removed a United Nations force from Gorazde and escorted it all the way to Belgrade, via Zagreb to Split, a journey of 1,000 km in extremely difficult circumstances. He says that the battalion's mission has constantly evolved during its time in former Yugoslavia. The area that it controls has grown to 13,000 sq km. It covers 257 km of confrontation line and is

"the most operational unit in the Army today."

The letter goes on:

"a lot of effort has been put into helping the local populace return to normality. The companies have repaired damaged houses in preparation for the winter, re-opened local schools, dug drainage ditches and the Battalion charity project has provided clothing for the needy."

Colonel Minter refers to the pleasure with which the battalion returned from the United Nations blue to wearing the Fusiliers' traditional hackle, and I well understand that.

Constant change has characterised the battalion's time in former Yugoslavia. Colonel Minter sums up his letter by saying:

"The First Fusiliers remain capable and willing to have a go at anything and have a high reputation for getting the job done well. We all miss England and look forward to returning to our loved ones after the tour. It will be hard being in Bosnia over Christmas but we are determined to do the job to the best of our abilities and look forward to the challenges of IFOR."

That is a far more typical account of the British Army today than what we heard from Opposition Members. That letter shows no sign of low morale.

Last year, the second battalion of fusiliers was based at Chester and exercised in Gibraltar, Hungary, Kenya, Belize and the Falkland islands. The Army is still a life of adventure for a young man. When that battalion goes to Germany later this year, the brigade will move to Poland for an exercise. It will be the first time that a British brigade has exercised in eastern Europe. John Wilsey, the present Commander-in-Chief of Land Forces, said:

"We have become the first port of call for the United Nations when they want a difficult job done."

It reflects great credit on our Army that, based on 50 years of confrontation with the Warsaw pact, it can take on whatever challenges there might be in the uncertain world now facing it. Like all our allies' armies, ours has been reduced by just over a quarter and reorganisation over the past few years has been a mammoth task. Fortunately, that period of inevitable turbulence is now coming to an end. It would be madness to reduce the Army further, whatever the siren voices in other directions say.

The November issue of *Armed Forces Journal International* says:

"Labor has been sphinx-like over its defense plans. All they have committed themselves to is a promise that they will carry out a defense review . . . With commitments to health, social security, education, and so forth, the cash cow of defense will be on the chopping block again.

Unless Labor is intent on overseeing deep cuts in military capability, it's difficult to imagine what new cost-saving measures would emerge from yet another defense review. All it would add is . . . damage to service morale".

That is a fair summary of the position if, God forbid, there should be a change of Government.

I am convinced that we must maintain the Army's high-intensity capability. If we abandon it, it will be a long and expensive business to get it back, in terms not only of equipment but of experience. Charles Guthrie, head of the Army, recently said that no army in the world was better equipped than the British Army. I would add to that statement by saying that no army in the world is better led than the British Army, which reflects the high spirit of all those who serve in it.

In recent years, huge sums have been spent on the finest equipment for our soldiers, but one capability that we shall need in the years ahead is just coming into service internationally—the capability provided by the J-stars system. I do not advocate a particular system, but we shall need that type of capability. For those who are not familiar with the initials, it is an airborne reconnaissance system which can provide an image of all the vehicles on the ground in an area of hundreds of miles. The system was proven in the Gulf and in Bosnia, and it would give a great advantage in battle to any army that possessed it. We must supply it to our Army in the future.

A special feature of our involvement in Bosnia is the enormous contribution we are making to the corps headquarters and the corps support system. Many of the 13,000 British troops there are involved in that vital role. No other European country in NATO could make that contribution. We are not contributing just the corps commander, but most of the staff in the corps, including a whole brigade of signallers. That is a great tribute to the capability of the British Army. Without that capability, NATO could not operate effectively in Bosnia.

We must determine a finite time for our stay in Bosnia. It is easy to get in and we all know how difficult it sometimes is to get out. It was right to set a limit of a year and when that time is up, it will be very difficult to go on beyond that time.

With change in the centre of gravity of the Army from Germany to the United Kingdom, there is obviously a need for more training in this country. Maximum use is being made of traditional areas of Canada, and now eastern Europe, but we must have effective training areas near the Army's bases in this country. In the north-east, that means increased use of Otterburn. I note that my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) is in his place, and I am sure that he will wish to speak on this subject. All that I will say is that I support the case for a sensible and controlled development of Otterburn, so that the armoured brigade that has moved to Catterick from Germany will be able to exercise with its weapons nearby. Catterick, of course, is now the largest garrison in the British Army.

[Mr. Neville Trotter]

The Army still has a large requirement for fit young men, but hardly anybody in the population these days has a detailed knowledge of the Army. Many families have nobody who has ever worn a uniform. That is a great challenge for the recruiting organisation.

Inevitably, there will be conflict between the two types of people who serve in the Army. If a fit young man is looking for adventure, the last thing he wants is stability. He wants real soldiering and to see the world. However, the career or professional soldier is probably a married man. The wives certainly are the unsung heroes, as my hon. Friend the Minister said at the beginning of the debate. The career soldier wants a more stable life style, and there will be problems reconciling those different factors.

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend has hit on an extremely important point, which I was not able to deal with in the time available. One of the important recommendations of the Bett review, which we are currently studying, is the whole question of how careers should be divided. No young man joins the infantry to sit around on his backside all the time. He wants excitement and adventure and as many deployments as possible. Morale is so high because the Army is so broadly deployed. One of the critical challenges for the future is how we retain those people satisfactorily.

Mr. Trotter: My own view is that the Bett review provides a strategic background to that problem, but it will not be easy to solve.

I hope that the recruitment through the jobcentres will work. I thought that it was ridiculous to suggest, as the Opposition have, that people who visit jobcentres would be made to join the Army. No employer has to take on anybody he does not want to take on and that applies as equally to the Army as to any other employer. I have never heard such an absurd suggestion. There must be a close link between the jobcentres and the military. The ethos of the military must be put over by somebody who actually believes in it and has experience of it. That should be taken into account when we rely more in the future on jobcentres.

I welcome the decision to bring back the junior soldiers and the junior leaders training regiments. History has shown that they have provided very sound men to the Army and I am sure that they will do so again. Similarly, the increased support for the Army cadet force is welcome. It has played an important role in inculcating the right attitude in young people who do not go into the Army, but experience adventure and discipline in the cadet force. They go into civilian life with benefits that they will never lose. The cadet force also provides many good recruits for the Army.

In Northumbria, John Stevens, the chief constable, is encouraging his officers to serve as instructors in the Army cadet force. That is a commendable initiative.

In an uncertain world, we can be certain that the British Army will continue to be challenged to respond rapidly to difficult and dangerous tasks. We can also be certain that the men and women who form the Army will respond with great professionalism and skill, as they always have in the past. The Army is a great asset to Britain and is rightly respected in this country and all over the world.

7.24 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I pay tribute to the Army in Bosnia. It is still performing a vital task for peace and I wish it good luck in its continuing work there. That is the end of my consensus with the Minister's statement.

I want to raise two issues about the Army, for which the Ministry of Defence should be accountable. The first was referred to in *The Observer* on 14 January in an article entitled "Gulf of Despair" by its defence correspondent Peter Beaumont. It is about the fifth anniversary of the Gulf war and the performance of the British forces. I hesitate to read it after the treatment my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) got for quoting the *Daily Express*. God knows what I will get for quoting *The Observer*. However, Peter Beaumont's words are relevant to the debate. He wrote:

"The mustering of armed forces for the Gulf had revealed the unthinkable. The four British armoured divisions on the Rhine, whose jobs for decades had been to help protect Europe against the towering might of a Red Army onslaught, proved so ill-maintained that the best Britain could muster was a single armoured division—and only after cannibalising its remaining Challenger tanks for spares. Once deployed in the Gulf, there were more shocks. The Challengers broke down so often that the RAF had to organise a 'Red Star' service to supply a stream of spares. Vickers, the manufacturers, had to deploy civilian engineers to the war zone to keep the tanks going.

It got worse: some British tank crews, it was discovered, had not fired their tank's main gun for two years.

'It was an absolute scandal,' said a senior officer involved in the planning of the Gulf war. 'It was one of the great lies. Suddenly we discovered that although the taxpayer had been stumping up for this force in Germany for years, it was only 23 per cent. effective and a large number of the crews hadn't even trained with their own weapon."

He continues:

"It was ironic. The Tories, the party of strong defence had allowed the armed forces to become so overstretched that the country's reputation as a serious military player was on the line . . . It had become horribly clear that if Britain committed its tanks to battle in the Arabian sands, she ran the risk of losing the effective strength of the entire British Army on the Rhine."

What an indictment of the Tory mismanagement of our nation's defences and the lack of accountability and the great secrecy of the Ministry of Defence.

The taxpayer has been ripped off for years by the arms manufacturers who supplied, at high cost, a lot of relatively poor equipment. We should get more than ministerial bluff as a response to the indictment in that article.

The second issue that I wish to raise in my short contribution comes from the programme "Face the Facts" on Radio 4 on 18 May 1995. The programme dealt with the shabby treatment meted out to service men, who suffered through the incompetence and stupidity of their comrades, especially those maimed or even killed by what the Army calls negligent discharges—weapons triggered recklessly or in avoidable accidents.

I refer to two cases that were discussed in the programme. The first concerned Gunner Bob Smith, who was taken to hospital after being shot. He had massive internal injuries; the guard who shot him, Gunner Sean Bennett,

"was handed over to the civil police and subsequently appeared in court where he admitted unlawful wounding. It then emerged that the shooting was a prank which had gone wrong. At the time he

pulled the trigger, Gunner Bennett hadn't realised there was a round in the firing chamber. He was sentenced to a year's youth detention. Gunner Smith got a life sentence in a wheelchair."

The programme presenter went on to point out that Gunner Smith was formally discharged from the Army on medical grounds on 31 June last year. Gunner Smith said:

"It makes me so angry that the MOD can more or less wipe their hands of it because . . . first of all, they employed me, they employed the man that shot me—they gave him the weapons to use, they put him on guard. It seemed to me they were the only ones that could be held responsible."

But the MOD refused to accept responsibility. At the time of the programme, some two and a half years after the shooting, it was still considering the question of liability.

Gunner Smith's solicitor, Hilary Meredith, claims, after having handled dozens of such cases, that getting the information from the Army that she needs to pursue legal claims is often the toughest part of the process. The programme quotes her as saying:

"We have no access to witnesses, we have no access to any information as to how these accidents happened until there is a Board of Inquiry and that can take up to two years. As far as locating witnesses are concerned, the MOD have a system whereby we will write to the witness in a sealed envelope, send it to the Ministry of Defence and they will try and locate him and pass on the . . . paperwork. It is then up to the witness to contact us. I've never yet had a witness that comes forward under those circumstances."

What a farcical system it is.

"Face the Facts" continued with the tragic case of Corporal Neil Hughes, who served with the first battalion of the Duke of Wellington's regiment:

"His father had been the Battalion's Regimental Sergeant Major and Neil had followed proudly in his footsteps . . . Neil Hughes was an exemplary soldier . . . On the 21st September 1993, Corporal Hughes set off for what was supposed to be a routine mock battle on Salisbury Plain."

Later that day, his wife was informed that her husband had been accidentally shot on the range and was undergoing surgery. Later again, she was told that he had died.

There was no Army board of inquiry. Corporal Hughes's wife was given very few details about how he had come to be shot.

"It wasn't until the civil inquest, a full year later, that she sat in a coroner's court and heard how her husband had fallen in a hail of bullets as an ill-planned war game went tragically wrong. It was only then, as she sat sobbing in an open courtroom that she was allowed to know that her husband's last words in a bloodstained trench were for her and the child. So damning was the evidence that the mock battle had been poorly planned and executed, leaving troops at risk, that the jury decided Corporal Hughes had been unlawfully killed. But so far as his widow and her lawyers have been able to discover, no action has been taken against anyone involved in the exercise. And to this day, there's been no Army Board of Inquiry."

The programme went on to say that there will almost certainly be no board of inquiry at all. In response to questions from the BBC, the MOD said that all the facts had been established during the coroner's inquest, so no board of inquiry was required:

"The statement added that the Ministry accepted the finding of unlawful killing and that those involved had been dealt with at the time. The statement did not say who they were, how they were dealt with or what, if any punishment they received. All this came as news to Mrs. Hughes. No one, it seems, thought to tell her those facts and it was left to us"—

the BBC—

"to do that just a short time ago."

Mrs. Hughes told the programme:

"It has been nearly two years since my husband's death and this now just puts me back to square one. I'm no further on now today than I was the night he died. I just find it diabolical that everybody else—a radio station—anybody else can find out this information which me as the widow should have been told first and I still don't even know it from the MOD. I have still heard it second-hand, as I have done everything else. I just feel again that I have been excluded whenever I should have been the main one."

The programme presenter asked Mrs. Hughes:

"And what are your views on the way the Ministry of Defence has handled this?"

She replied:

"I just feel it's been so cold and callous towards me and my family. I think it's horrendous. He died carrying out their work and it's like they have just pushed him away."

This is just one example of the lack of human feeling in the MOD and of the callous way in which it treats former soldiers and their families. Money and meanness are at the root of it all. Denying responsibility at all costs seems to be the MOD's motto.

We have heard other examples in this Chamber, relating to nuclear test veterans, Gulf war syndrome victims and so on, which show that the MOD always tries to avoid accepting responsibility. I say to Ministers and the MOD: get a human face.

7.35 pm

Sir Anthony Grant (South-West Cambridgeshire): We are all devoted to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen). He is one of the most agreeable Members of the House. There is no greater champion of the underdog and the unfortunate. I am certain that Ministers will take careful note of the radio programme to which the hon. Gentleman clearly listened so closely, always bearing in mind his great sincerity—even if he is often hopelessly wrong. More generally, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will broaden his reading somewhat beyond *The Observer*. If he does so, his attitude may change.

I am one of the declining band of old soldiers still in this House. I have worn my regimental tie for this occasion—

Mr. Soames: I am one of them, too.

Sir Anthony Grant: I seem to recall that my hon. Friend belonged to a junior regiment, yes.

In my day, the British Army was undoubtedly the finest in the world. I have no hesitation in saying that the modern Army is much better, and much more efficient. It has to deal with much more sophisticated equipment, and it needs to be more technically sound than it was in my day. A soldier in my day who had some mechanical ability and was very fit could, with luck, get into the armoured corps. If he lacked that ability, but was very fit and could shoot, he could get into the infantry. If he had none of those qualities, he was put in the cookhouse.

But these days, the modern soldier has to be highly efficient. I join in the Minister's justifiable tribute to the armed forces and the modern soldier, and the role that they play.

When the cold war ended, everyone understood that our defensive strategies and policies would have to change. But that did not mean a declining role for the Army. On the contrary, it has, if anything, played an increasing role

[Sir Anthony Grant]

since then throughout the world. George Orwell's forecast has come true. He predicted in his novel "1984", written in the 1940s, that there would be no more global war—world wars were done for—but that there would permanently be regional wars all over the world.

That is precisely what has happened, in the Falklands, in Brunei, in the Gulf, in Bosnia and in Northern Ireland. The British Army has had to be engaged in all those places, and it is fortunate for us and for the peace of the world that it has been so engaged. I was critical of some the political decisions made when we intruded into the Balkans affair, but, having made those decisions, it is fortunate that the British Army, which is the best in the world in this respect, is there carrying out a remarkable task with the utmost efficiency.

The British Army deserves the best equipment and service that it can obtain. The best equipment is not necessarily made in Britain. A good case can be made that, if the Army needs the best, equipment may have to come from abroad. The broad principle we adopt in procurement, as I understand it, is that, while we are not chauvinistic or xenophobic—as the French and Americans all too often are—where the price and quality are roughly equal in a defence contract, the balance should be tipped in favour of domestic industry.

I am therefore glad about the decision to give the contract for the 800 ambulances to Land-Rover and Marshalls, and I pay special tribute to the MOD for that. My interest is chiefly in Marshalls, which makes the ambulance body for the Land-Rover vehicle. It would be fair to say that the expertise and quality of the part of the ambulance made by Marshalls perhaps tipped the argument in favour of the contract being given—as my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement so wisely gave it—to the Land-Rover and Marshall consortium.

I repeat how impressed I have been with the impeccable way in which my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement has handled the whole delicate matter. He has listened patiently to the arguments from all sides. He has met me, my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), who has Marshalls in his constituency, and the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), who has joined forces across the party divide and has part of Marshalls in her constituency. He listened to the arguments with great care, sagacity and, if I may say so, great inscrutability and total fairness. I commend him for taking his time and finally coming to a decision that is in the interests of the British Army and the services as well as of British industry, whether in Cambridge or the midlands.

The decision has been taken for three reasons in particular. First, the price of the British bid was lower than that of the Austrian bid. That is an important consideration when there are constraints on finance. Secondly, while it is a horrible word, commonality of services, equipment and spares is immensely important. Thirdly, the Land-Rover Marshall vehicle is wanted by the medics themselves. They are the people who have to work in them, and they have much closer contact with them than do high-powered committees, no matter how grand, in the MOD. On all those grounds, the decision was wholly justified. I commend the Government for that. There is great delight in Cambridge about it.

We have heard a lot about morale. As an old soldier, I know that there has never been a time since the dawn of mankind when the British Army has not grumbled. When it has grumbled, it has nearly always done its task well. There has never been a time when it has not had a thoroughly healthy contempt for politicians, no matter what their party.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Quite right.

Sir Anthony Grant: That is absolutely right, but what is more, the Army will serve; it will do its duty wherever it may be, no matter what king reigns or which party rules. I have had not only a father, uncle and two cousins who served in two wars, but a son-in-law who was until recently an officer in the Royal Artillery. I am satisfied that there is nothing wrong with the morale of the British Army or the British soldier. No matter what party or politicians are in power, they will do their duty by their Queen and country.

7.44 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): It is an unusual privilege nowadays to follow an honourable old soldier in these debates, because there are so few fellows of that sort in the House. There are one or two ex-cavalry officers, but we will leave them in silence.

Earlier, I said that it was a real pleasure and privilege last Friday evening formally to open the Army Cadet Force hall at Highholm street, Port Glasgow. I put it on record that Colonel Gallagher, Major Wilson and Staff Sergeant McCafferty have produced a very fine unit of intensely keen, smart young soldiers, who wear, it will not surprise some people to hear, the cap badge of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, which recruits extensively in my constituency and neighbouring ones.

As part of the formal opening, I was asked to inspect those young soldiers. I think that I still have something of a keen eye. They were well turned out, and their boots gleamed. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) said that some youngsters today are unfit and only ever wear trainers. I invite him to Port Glasgow to see the youngsters in their Argyll and Sutherland Highlander's uniforms. I also sat in on map-reading exercises and first-aid training, and was even daft enough to have a go on the range. I fired six or seven rounds at a target. My marksmanship left a lot to be desired, I regret to say.

As I said earlier to the Minister of State, those youngsters and Colonel Gallagher and his officers and NCOs are poorly equipped. I accept what the Minister said, but the .22 rifle that I used to fire in the general direction of the target was as heavy as the old Lee Enfield .303 that I trained with all those years ago. I do not usually go in for special pleading, but I ask that a fresh examination be conducted into the way in which such units are equipped.

Many of the youngsters involved are from difficult areas of my constituency that are characterised by massive unemployment. Many of their fellows at school or work are misusing or experimenting with drugs. The youngsters that I met are not, although I caught one of them smoking

round the back and, as an ex-smoker, I read him the riot act. It is marvellous to see such youngsters in the cadet force, but their equipment could be improved.

I must absolve Colonel Gallagher, Major Wilson and Staff Sergeant McCafferty from my special pleading. They did not know that I would speak this evening, although they might have had a good idea. They are not part of this—

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Conspiracy.

Dr. Godman: As my hon. Friend suggests, it is a one-man conspiracy.

It gave me a lot of pride, as their Member of Parliament and an ex-military policeman, to see how smart and enthusiastic those youngsters were. Even if they do not join the Argylls, or another regiment, such as the Royal Scots or the Kings Own Scottish Borderers, they are being taught disciplines and skills that will serve them well in whatever work they undertake. They are taught the discipline that is needed to perform their duties. They are being taught the essentials of comradeship, which is important in any kind of work. However, I believe that they should be better equipped, as, to put it bluntly, their resources were very poor.

I am not happy about Army recruitment by way of the jobcentre. I much prefer recruitment through recruitment officers. Last Friday, I spoke with a company sergeant-major in the Scots Guards who has wide recruitment experience, and he said that it is the best way. Youngsters should go to a recruitment centre to meet professional soldiers, who will give them advice from the shoulder. That is what they need if they are thinking of joining the armed forces.

In the morning, I shall check with the manager of the Greenock job centre, Mr. Ian Pollard, to determine what guidelines he has been given by his superiors in Edinburgh and London. I have no objection to the staff at my local jobcentre advising youngsters about careers in the armed forces, but that is where their role must end. What sort of training or induction procedures have jobcentre staff received to enable them to advise youngsters about careers in the services? Such careers may be very fulfilling, but I do not believe that jobcentre staff should perform the recruitment function. Next week, I shall visit my local jobcentre and make my views known.

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East touched upon the issue of homosexuality in the armed forces. I have a good deal of sympathy for his remarks, but I was not always so sympathetic. As a military policeman, I recall patrolling the Sennelager area in what was then west Germany and encountering a young soldier engaged in an act of sodomy with a German civilian. I found it completely repugnant, and I believed that that young soldier deserved to serve at least five years in Colchester.

He received the most vicious bullying while in the guardroom. I recall telling the regimental police sergeant—in the presence of a couple of my colleagues, because I ensured that I had witnesses and he did not—that, if ever I saw him in a guest house or in a bar in Sennelager or elsewhere, I would lift him, even if he were only sniffing the barmaid's apron. I was appalled by the way in which that young soldier was treated. Now, I adopt a much more mature and detached attitude to the issue of homosexuality in the armed forces, and I am keen to see the review when it is published.

I now refer, as did to the hon. and learned Gentleman, to harassment. In the middle of last year, a young female constituent, who was very keen to rejoin the Army, came to see me. She had been stationed in Lichfield, and she said that she had suffered both sexual and racial harassment. Her English squad corporal had complained nastily that her west of Scotland accent was incomprehensible, and told her that she had better do something about it. She was subjected to that sort of bullying for a fairly lengthy period.

I brought the case to the attention of the Minister and his ministerial colleagues, and received a sympathetic hearing. The young woman asked me not to take the case any further. She has been discharged from the Army on health grounds, but when her health recovers she hopes to re-enlist. I hope that she will not be discriminated against in any way because she had the temerity to approach her Member of Parliament and complain about harassment.

As a young soldier, I experienced bullying. That is not to say that military policemen ever bullied anyone—at least, not in my presence—as we were too decent for that. Bullying in the barracks will never be eliminated. Nevertheless, I am pleased with the way in which the Ministry of Defence is dealing with that serious problem. Youngsters who are perhaps 200 or 300 miles away from home for the first time do not want to be harassed by bullying squad corporals or other soldiers. It is right and proper that the Ministry of Defence should take the matter very seriously.

Regretfully, I believe that the Ministry of Defence and the Army failed my young constituent. I hope that, if she re-enlists, her application will be treated with the utmost sympathy. The Minister or his officials will know the girl's name, her regimental number and other details.

I am also very concerned about what appears to be the policy of reinstating in regiments men who have committed acts of violence. I never approved of the reinstatement of the soldier Clegg. As a redcap, I witnessed some appalling acts of violence, and I saw women who had been raped and viciously beaten. When a regular soldier is convicted and serves a sentence, I do not believe that he should be re-engaged. A soldier who is guilty of committing an act of violence should be discharged ignominiously.

Sir Jim Spicer: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not attempting to class Private Clegg with people who deliberately commit criminal acts. Private Clegg acted in the line of duty, and many people, including me, believe that he was innocent and should not have been found guilty.

Dr. Godman: I do not wish to introduce a note of controversy into the debate, but I disagree completely with the hon. Member. Private Clegg was charged with and convicted of murder. I should like to see the charge of culpable homicide introduced into the Armed Forces Bill. We have that charge in Scotland, and I think that it makes much more sense than having the two charges of manslaughter and murder. I am not a member of the Standing Committee that will scrutinise and amend the legislation.

Dr. Reid: My hon. Friend may be.

Dr. Godman: I must be careful what I say; I thought that I could speak with confidence, but perhaps hon. Members have not yet been chosen to serve on the Committee.

It seems to me that the charge of culpable homicide is worthy of scrutiny, and perhaps the Bill should be amended to include it. I stand by what I have said: those who inflict violence upon civilians and others are not worthy of their cap badges, and they should be discharged.

Finally, I too offer my compliments to our soldiers stationed in Bosnia and elsewhere. I think that British infantrymen—I suppose that I should add, also their comrades in the cavalry regiments—are among the finest peacekeepers in the world. That view was expressed to the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) and me at the United Nations recently. In discussions with me, United Nations officials spoke very highly of our soldiers. Discipline, training and their experience in Northern Ireland have made our soldiers among the finest in the world. That means that they must receive the very best of training. They must be as well equipped as any army in the world. Their family concerns need always to be treated with the utmost sensitivity, especially when requests are made for compassionate leave. Such requests must never be ignored. The good officer and the good NCO—NCOs run our regiments anyway—are always conscious of such matters. The Ministry of Defence has an important role to play when issuing guidelines to commanding officers and others on the family needs and concerns of our soldiers.

8 pm

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): I am grateful for the opportunity to say a few words.

We have heard about the changes that have taken place in the Army over the past five years, which have been highly significant. From 160,000 officers and men and women, we are now down to about 112,000. Any organisation that has seen that much change over a relatively short period will have experienced problems. In my view, however, the problems in the Army have been dealt with especially professionally by the Ministers involved, including my hon. Friend the Minister of State, who is no longer in his place. The same can be said of all the service personnel who have been involved in making the consequent changes.

The British Army was a professional organisation at the start of the changes, and it remains so. Along with a number of my right hon. and hon. Friends, I would have wished the changes in the Army to take place over a longer period. I welcome some of the reassurances that we have received. We have been told that the changes are at an end, and that the Army, like the other two services, can look forward to considerable stability over the next few years.

Several hon. Members have talked about the problem of recruitment. I am convinced that, at the start of the process of change five years ago, few people involved in the Army—the same can be said of those outside—recognised that there would be such a problem. Most Army personnel thought that, by reducing the size of the Army to the extent that we have, there would be no problem in recruiting the fewer men and women who would be required. That has not been the case. I suspect that one of the reasons is that people outside in the community also thought that the Army did not require many recruits. As a result, the Army no longer seemed the career that previously people had considered it to be.

The changes that have taken place in the pattern of recruitment should have been thought through a little more carefully. I have nothing against jobcentres providing advice to those who wish to go into the three services. I would have wished, however, that the information provided in the jobcentres was available before some of the career offices were shut.

It is true that many career offices throughout the country did not directly recruit a great many service men, but they provided a shop window for the armed forces. Shutting them gave the impression, indirectly if not directly, that the armed services, and especially the Army, did not want the number of recruits that they now need. I welcome what my hon. Friend the Minister of State has said about what is being done to make a correction.

I suggest that one of the reasons for the underspend this year in the defence budget was that the Army did not recruit the number of men and women that it wanted. I would have liked to see a percentage of that underspend used to enhance the recruitment budget so that we could return to the level that was originally anticipated. I understand that that might have caused one or two problems during the discussions that the Minister of Defence had with the Treasury this year. It seems that the savings that have been made balance out exactly the money that was not spent this year on the original estimates.

I was pleased when my hon. Friend the Minister of State mentioned the junior leaders. I, too, believe that we made a mistake some years ago in disbanding the battalion. I am pleased that we are now taking steps to recruit youngsters at an earlier age. There is no doubt in my mind that education standards have improved; the two years between 16 and 18 are extremely important in a young man's life, and he could well go down the wrong road. Even at the age of 18, he might not be suitable for recruitment into the Army, because of what had happened in the interim.

I am encouraged by what has been said about the cadet movement. I would like to see a firmer commitment to increasing the size of the movement. It has an important role to play in recruitment. I acknowledge, however, that relatively few cadets join the regular armed forces. At the same time, they provide an important link between the armed services and the civilian community. That link will become even more important in future.

Unlike virtually every other armed service throughout Europe, we do not have a citizens' army. We do not have people who, after leaving school, go into an armed service. As we have a professional army—it is right that we should—all the time, the number of people who have had experience of military life is reducing. If we are generally to understand the need for armed services—they carry out an excellent role—we must develop links between civilian and military life styles. The cadet movement is one way of achieving exactly that. As has been said, many adult volunteers give up their spare time to encourage useful activities that help self-reliance and confidence.

The cadet movement is extremely important for another reason. I believe that it fulfils a useful social purpose. It provides a gainful occupation for teenagers. If they were not in the movement, they might well be doing other things not nearly as constructive.

I was struck by a statistic showing that it costs less than £500 to keep someone in one of the cadet movements for one year. It costs over £2,000 a week to send a young offender who has stolen a few motor cars to an outward bound centre in north Wales, let alone to a holiday in Egypt, where the young person would carry out precisely the same sort of activities that he would experience in the three cadet movements. I sincerely hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Government Front Bench will continue to press the Home Office to recognise the excellent work that is undertaken by the cadet movements and that, as a result, the movements will receive some financial benefit to increase their size, so that they might carry out their important social role.

Opposition Members would be disappointed if I did not mention the Labour party's contribution to the debate. If the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) does not mind, I shall not mention his speech especially. It was a good knockabout speech. I think that he was fishing a bit too far when he talked about a regulation associated with the jobseeker's legislation. My hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter), who has left the Chamber, dealt with that extremely well. If people do not volunteer for something and if others do not want anyone, it cannot be said that anyone has refused a job.

Dr. Reid: First, I have no objection to the use of jobcentres. Secondly, I would encourage people to join the Army. Thirdly, there is volunteering. If someone is not very keen on a job and there is the implicit threat of removal of benefit, suddenly that person becomes extremely keen on that job. I said that there is no exemption under the jobseekers regulations, which are before Parliament, for armed forces' jobs through the jobcentres. Under the regulations, every other job, if not accepted, will lead to the withdrawal of benefit.

To retain the voluntary and professional nature of the services, which the hon. Gentleman, the Minister and I want, as do the armed forces, will the Government please bring forward an explicit amendment to the regulations? Let us ensure that no young person is under any threat of compulsion or coercion, at the discretion of any local persons. I hope that my intervention clarifies the matter. The issue is not whether the Army or anyone else wants someone, but whether someone feels that he should apply for a job because there will be a financial penalty if he does not.

Mr. Mans: I should not have given way, as we have just heard another speech. I am sure that my hon. Friend on the Front Bench has heard what the hon. Gentleman has said, and if there is any need to examine the regulations, I am certain that that will be done, because I am quite convinced that what the hon. Gentleman has said is just not true in practice.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I can assure my hon. Friend quite expressly that any rejection of a service career by someone who does not want a service career will not involve his losing benefit as a result.

Mr. Mans: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point—most Conservative Members had understood it—in a way that the hon. Member for South Shields can also understand.

What is more relevant is that, following the demise of the cold war and the Soviet Union, there have been tremendous changes in the size of the armed forces. If there had been—God forbid—a Labour Government since, very few people would think that the armed services would be in the good position that they are in now. Despite a number of Opposition Members who are very honourable and understand the need for the armed forces, the fact remains that the Labour party has always had different priorities.

Put simply: the Labour party's philosophy puts social security in front of national security. We had a fair number of examples of that—I personally experienced those examples—when we last had a Labour Government, in the mid-1970s. Sometimes, I have to say, some of my colleagues have not been quite as forthright as they should in making that clear. To me, national security must always come before social security, and we must ensure that the available resources are used first for the defence of the country.

Something else separates our view on defence from that of the Labour party—the hon. Gentleman alluded to this, although I do not know whether he quite realised that he had done so. Essentially, the armed services are for fighting wars. We must ensure that we are properly defended so that we can fight a high-tech war, of the sort that we saw in the Gulf, for example. We must not allow the primary role of our armed services to be peacekeeping.

Indeed, I would go further and suggest one additional reason why we have problems with recruitment. We were a member of the UN forces in Bosnia during the war there. That was not an incentive to recruitment. I strongly suspect that the experiences of many soldiers out there was not of the sort that would encourage others to join. I also strongly suspect that, following the NATO involvement, we shall now see an upturn in recruitment as a result of the activities that it is able to perform there.

An important part of ground operations—hon. Members would probably expect me to mention this—is the contribution of air power. We have just seen on television a very interesting programme on the Gulf war. I do not wish to comment on what a particular general said about the RAF operations. The statement has already been shown to be inaccurate. I sincerely hope that he corrects his statements, as I am certain that he will in the weeks ahead. I want to dwell on what we saw.

The British Army has been fortunate over the past 40 or 50 years. It has always been able to fight a land battle in the knowledge that it had air superiority. The only time when we came close to losing that was during the Falklands—one of the most tragic incidents was the loss of the Sir Galahad—and we lost a huge number of soldiers as a result.

It is difficult deciding whether to buy more aircraft or more tanks or other ground vehicles. It must be doubly difficult for a general to suggest that perhaps we need a few more aircraft. I must tell the House, as a former airman, that I am quite certain that the day when we do not have sufficient air superiority for our Army to operate will be the day when the British Army recognises that it has made a mistake. There must be a balance: otherwise

[Mr. Mans]

the scenes—as we saw on television over the past week, which showed what the Iraqi Army suffered—would be devastating.

I am quite convinced that the changes that have taken place have been handled well. I am also convinced that we can do much to enhance our recruitment. There is no doubt in many people's minds that, although the armed services are most certainly safe in the hands of the Conservative Government, they most certainly would not be as safe in the hands of the Opposition parties.

8.16 pm

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): The hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) has brought considerable expertise to the deliberations of the Defence Committee. He is usually rather helpful. He made a brave attempt at being partisan, which is out of character, but I shall not hold that against him, as I realise that an election is coming up.

Perhaps I should put in an early bid to take part in the same debate next year, because I hope to learn a lot more about the work of the armed forces, and the Army in particular, during the coming year, not only as a member of the Defence Committee but having signed up—I believe volunteered is the term—for the armed forces parliamentary scheme. Not only will I see many soldiers but I will see quite a lot of the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland). I suspect that we shall hear again and again, as I have in recent years in meetings with members of the armed forces, that they are undermanned, under-recruited and overstretched. The Defence Committee has been going on about that for years.

We heard from the Minister about the emergency tour interval. Twenty-four months is supposed to be the minimum, yet he boasted that it is now the average. That is a step in the right direction, but the Department has been striving to meet that objective for many years and has not done so yet. That is taking its toll on service men and their families. The Department must do better.

I understand why people such as the hon. Member for Wyre and others like to accuse Opposition Members of causing uncertainty in the armed forces by our undertaking to have a comprehensive defence review when we come to power. It is, perhaps, more satisfactory for the armed forces to have one major defence review and to set the strategic objectives in the long-term rather than the on-going grind that they have suffered from the Conservative Government—"Options for Change", defence cost studies, "Front Line First" and so on, and a 30 per cent. cut. It is no wonder that morale is not what it should be. Even this Government, in their dying months, must try to do better.

Specifically, I endorse the point that was made by the Chairman of the Defence Committee earlier about Gulf war syndrome. The Committee was unanimous on that point. There is an overwhelming case for the MOD to undertake an epidemiological study to ascertain whether there is such a condition and, if so, what it may or may not be. For Ministers to adopt the position that it does not exist or that sufferers from it are malingering will not do. There is no question but that the people seen by the Select Committee are ill and they are entitled to proper understanding and proper action.

The Minister of State opened with an important statement about the deployment in Bosnia. Hon. Members may be aware that I have spent a certain amount of time in Bosnia, both with the Committee and—perhaps rather recklessly—at the wheels of lorries in convoys run by Edinburgh Direct Aid last summer and the previous one. I have driven on most of the roads made by British Army engineers in central Bosnia.

I join the Minister in paying tribute to the engineers for their remarkable achievement in creating those links, which would not otherwise be there, and which have made it possible for UNHCR and other organisations to take assistance desperately needed by refugees and others in isolated communities such as Tuzla, Sarajevo and other areas of central Bosnia. It was a harrowing experience for me to see the plight of refugees from places such as Srebrenica and Zepa last summer. It has at least been possible to keep those people alive, and that is the achievement of UNPROFOR.

I join the Minister and others in paying tribute to all the British service men and those from other national contingents in UNPROFOR who have worked hard, often in great danger, during the past three to four years to make it possible to sustain that operation. I certainly join him in wishing the new IFOR contingent well. I look forward to seeing it in the course of the coming year.

I recall taking part in an Army debate three years ago when the deployment in Bosnia was fresh and new and we were all rather confused and perhaps optimistic. At that stage, we were talking about the Vance-Owen plan—the first of many. I remember saying that a massive force would have to be put into Bosnia in order to enforce an agreement, and that such a massive deployment would inevitably require United States participation. We have got there at last. Meanwhile, about 200,000 people have lost their lives in that vicious civil war.

The trouble was that, for all the good will, UNPROFOR had neither the mandate nor the firepower to make that peace stick. All concerned can draw important lessons from that experience. The fundamental difficulty was that Bosnia is a European problem. We had to wait that amount of time for an American-led solution to a fundamentally European problem. It required United States diplomacy, forces and lift to achieve what is being achieved there now.

I do not blame the Americans for being reluctant to become embroiled in such a conflict. It is in a faraway place of which we know comparatively little, and for the Americans it is an even further-away place, of which they know even less. Why should they get involved in such European conflicts?

In view of the instability and the difficulties in eastern and central Europe, and perhaps also on the southern flank of NATO, there is a powerful case for the development of a stronger European defence entity. We cannot always rely on Uncle Sam to send GIs to deal with problems in Europe. It is time that the European nations got together to lead a stronger and more coherent European defence entity, and the obvious leaders for such a scenario must be Britain and France. That should be the objective.

It has been said again and again in the debate, and rightly so, that the British Army is one of the best, if not the best, in the world—that has been manifested time again, for example, in Northern Ireland and Bosnia—but does it have the tools required to do that job? The

equipment that has just been taken out to Bosnia for our contingent in IFOR had to be carried in foreign ships in many cases. That is one point that should be addressed more vigorously.

Even more important is the question of our ability to mount amphibious operations at all. An article in the 27 November edition of *Defence News*, referring to a report submitted to the Secretary of State by the directorate of operational capability in October, said:

"Britain's armed forces no longer have the shipping capability to carry out an amphibious assault on the same scale as the Falklands operation, according to a highly classified Ministry of Defence report."

Being an inquisitive soul, I tabled a question to see whether I could discover a little more about that report. Predictably, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces replied:

"Reports produced by my directorate of operational capability are classified documents, and constitute advice to Ministers. It is not our practice to place such documents in the Library of the House."

Surprise, surprise. He went on:

"The Royal Navy retains the capability to conduct amphibious operations in support of our defence policy objectives. This capability is currently being enhanced by the acquisition of the helicopter carrier HMS Ocean, which was launched earlier this year, and the refit of the landing ship logistic Sir Bedivere."

The final sentence is the intriguing one. It says:

"Negotiations are under way with VSEL on its tender to replace the amphibious ships HMS Fearless and Intrepid."—[*Official Report*, 4 December 1995; Vol. 268, c. 3.]

Veterans of the Defence Committee will know the protracted story of the replacements for Fearless and Intrepid, the amphibious assault ships. As long ago as 1975, Ministers were worrying about their replacement. The Government's whole life has been spent talking about the replacement of those ships—the one commissioned in 1965, the other in 1967, both steam powered. I will not bore the House with the catalogue of false starts, talks about a ship life extension programme, and so on, but here we are, 20 years on, with still no answer.

We now have the NAPNOC initiative whereby VSEL has been invited to bid to replace the ships on the principle of no acceptable price, no contract. The trouble is that what flows from that is no contract, no capability for an amphibious operation such as was undertaken in the Falklands. I shall be interested to know whether the Government intend to take that decision. It is obviously long overdue.

It is all very well to praise our armed forces—we can all do that—but our armed forces need the tools to do the job and I fear that the evidence of recent years shows that the Government are not prepared to sustain the scale of either our armed forces as required or the equipment of our armed forces as required.

8.27 pm

Sir Jim Spicer (West Dorset): I shall try to be as brief as I can, but I have to open by saying that the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) did himself less than justice in his opening speech and when he reads it tomorrow I think that he will agree with me.

I am not in the habit of quoting or hiding behind newspaper articles and retired generals, but the hon. Gentleman's speech turned my mind to an article in the *Daily Express* today entitled "Could we win a war today?" from which I shall quote one short extract. It says:

"In our current Defence Secretary, so hated by liberals"—

I imagine that that means new Labour—

"of all persuasions, we have a man of firmness and of vision. Michael Portillo who aspires, and rightly so, to lead his Party and his country. He has many of the qualities necessary. We expect him to make economies where they can be safely made. But we also expect him to stand firm against the mania for cuts designed to deliver lower taxes.

Portillo is, among other talents, an historian. As such he knows that advocates of defence spending always over-state their case. As the great Lord Salisbury once put it: 'If you listen to the Generals, nothing is safe.'"

I leave it there.

Almost all the hon. Members who have taken part in the debate have said, rightly, that we are proud of our armed forces and of our Army. Over the years, its professionalism, discipline and confidence has been displayed many times, as they are again today.

I had to live through the days of national service. As a regular soldier, I could not have been more delighted when conscription came to an end. It was sapping our professionalism in the armed forces and we were spending far too much time on training young conscripts, good though they were. Now we have a solidly professional Army, smaller in size compared with other conscript armies, but more than making up for that by its training and ability.

The world has changed and anyone who says that we cannot reduce the defence spending level of five years ago is living in cloud cuckoo land. The limit of the cuts, however, has now been reached and we cannot afford to reduce the strength, especially of our infantry battalions, any further. It is no use having establishments of infantry battalions when those battalions are not being kept up to strength.

This is not a criticism—my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces made clear the concern that we all feel about the recruiting figures—but it is a fact that we are some 2,000 men short in the infantry today. That does not sound a large number, but it is 10 per cent. of our infantry strength. That should cause concern.

As my hon. Friend the Minister said, however, we must understand that the infantry, by its very nature, demands and needs an inflow of competent, capable young people, and that people will be leaving the infantry at a much earlier age than they will other arms of the services. We must therefore have highly motivated young men and women who are determined to make the Army their career, but who are prepared, when they reach the age of about 40, to go into a second career—we must always bear that in mind.

Are we recruiting sufficient young men of quality? It is self-evident that we are not. How could we improve recruiting? We could have better publicity. There is a marvellous story to tell about today's Army and the way of life that young people can expect when they go into it. The role of a soldier in an infantry battalion today is startlingly different from, but much more rewarding than, that role in such a battalion six years ago.

What was that role six years ago? One travelled to Germany with the battalion and went through a succession of annual training cycles. One would wake up on 1 January of one year and know that one would be going through exactly the same cycle as the year before. On top of that, increasingly, all infantry soldiers had to face up to the fact of more and more tours in Northern Ireland.

[Sir Jim Spicer]

To be honest, having led a platoon in difficult country on active service, the one thing that I would not have liked to do was patrol the streets of Belfast at certain times during the troubles. I pay tribute to all our soldiers who had to face that duty.

We must consider providing better recruiting facilities. It may not be ideal to use jobcentres, but they are there and there are many more of them than there could be of Army or service recruiting centres. I suggest to the Minister who will reply that we use those jobcentres, recruit people who are leaving the armed services at about the age of 40, and put them in the jobcentres. They would be capable of doing the job in the Employment Service, but they would also be available to give specialist advice as and when required to people who might want to join the Army. A manager could then say, "There is George. He has been in the Army. He will tell you all about it."

It has been said that a problem exists in relation to 16 to 18-year-olds. If I were 16 years old, leaving school and wanting to join the Army, I would know that a gap in time existed before I could do so. If I were worth anything, I would get a job. By the time that I approached 18, therefore, I would not want to join the Army, because I would be too settled. Why on earth does that happen? I gather that the Highland Division is carrying out an experiment with a junior company. Let us get back to that, because it gives young people an incentive, good training and, above all, a good education.

If the money is not available in the defence budget, surely it would be right and proper for the Ministry of Defence to turn to the Department for Education and Employment and say, "Half the content of this one-year training programme involves education. Therefore, you can pay for it." I suggest to the Minister that it is worth a try.

Why on earth do we have a recruitment age of about 18? I joined the Army when I was 16. Some people are perfectly mature at that age, others are not, but there is no reason why we should not reduce the recruitment age to 17 for certain people. We, and they, should have a right to choose. We could take such young people in, or reject them.

Why do we not allow Territorial Army battalions to take youngsters in at the age of 16? We all know what a good job the cadets do, but, by the time they reach 16, many young cadets are fed up with seeing 11 and 12-year-olds coming along behind them. They are ready and possibly willing to go into the TA. It would not be a large number and we might not get many recruits, but at least it would not cost a great deal of money. It might be worth experimenting with that idea.

On recruiting teams in schools, there was once a major problem with that in some areas. I hope to goodness that that time has come and gone and that new Labour will make it clear to all schools under their control that they should allow Army recruiting teams in to tell young people about the value of Army life. I see the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) nodding his head. I am sure that he will do all he can to bring that about.

Those were just a few thoughts from a regular ex-soldier, long retired from the Army. I am concerned about the 10 per cent. shortfall, and all the predictions are that that figure could rise to 20 per cent.—some 4,000 infantry. Something must be done to avoid this. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces for his awareness and his determination to do something about it.

We have all talked about the Territorial Army and know its value. Is it not strange that the most senior officer in the TA, which gives splendid support to our regular forces, is a brigadier? No other reserve force, including the National Guard and the Australian Reserve Forces, does not have a civilian general in charge, obviously with the back-up of a regular alongside. Is it not time that we gave that ultimate accolade to the TA and say, "You do a good job; you must have someone in the TA who could and should be a major-general"? That would be recognition of its work. I commend that proposal to the Minister when he replies.

8.37 pm

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): Some of the wisest words that we have heard tonight have come from our wise old warriors, my hon. Friends the Members for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer) and for South-West Cambridgeshire (Sir A. Grant). We should consider the words of my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire—who has no doubt had the good sense to retire to the mess at this stage of evening—on the question of morale and the danger of listening to the views of retired Army officers, especially senior ones, after they have left the service.

In the old days, bucolic colonels used to shower *The Times* with letters from the shires. No one, except perhaps retired admirals, took much notice of them. Nowadays, unfortunately, their views are picked up by the tabloid press and are used by the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) to attack the Army.

Of course, in an organisation as big as the Army, one will find people who are discontented—that is inevitable. After the end of the cold war, it was clearly necessary to go through "Options for Change" and "Front Line First", which meant a dramatic change in the way in which the Army operated, and the civilianisation of many support services. Undoubtedly, it changed the life of some serving senior officers—the life in the mess changed with the advent of civilianisation. Clearly, those people were not happy. That was inevitable. I do not think that the same applies among younger men and women in the services today.

Visiting local Army bases, I was impressed by the enthusiasm of young people who were keen to go out to Bosnia and undertake other tasks that the Army undertakes nowadays. All our lives are busier than they used to be, but young people are taking up their tasks in the Army with relish. I do not agree with what Opposition Members have said about morale; I place far more credence in the letter read out by my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter), which demonstrated the level of morale in the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers—which recruits many people from the north and from my constituency.

I think that we all agree that the Army needs training. Given that we no longer have access to training in Germany, we must develop the facility at home. It is a pity that the MOD has experienced so much difficulty in securing an expansion of the training area in Otterburn, part of which is in my constituency. Training is needed in the use of new weapons such as the AS90, the Warrior and the multiple launch rocket systems.

Unfortunately, although local people in the Otterburn training area support that multi-million pound development, some are fighting a rearguard action to prevent it. I am sorry that the chairman of the Council for National Parks, Sir Chris Bonington, turned up at a demonstration in Otterburn to protest about the Army's plans, demanding that no provision should be made for the AS90 and the modern weapons now being deployed in Bosnia, and asking for a public inquiry into the scheme to extend training on the Otterburn ranges.

Luckily, some of the local people found out about the demonstration, and when Sir Chris turned up with his supporters in their anoraks and walking boots, they were met by another group. The locals waved their own banners, reading "Bonington go home". They knew that the country needs the Army, which plays an important part in the life of the remote Northumbrian community. I am glad to say that the demonstration ended without having the public impact that Sir Chris Bonington had expected.

A public inquiry would delay the Army's implementation of the plan for at least two years, probably three. The Army cannot wait that long. Men and equipment are returning from Germany, and training is necessary in this country. I am pleased to learn that—as a result of pressure from local people, I believe—the Northumbrian national park authority, which controls planning in the military training area, hopes to reach a compromise with the Army. With luck, the outcome will be in March.

I must say something about the role of the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), the shadow Secretary of State. Sadly, he was unable to attend today's debate. On 9 September, his local newspaper, the Newcastle *Journal*, reported that he had led a diatribe against some of my constituents at another demonstration in Otterburn, where he was joined by a group of ramblers. The shadow Secretary of State—in his anorak—accused my constituents of being

"narrow-minded, selfish and fuelled by anti-Tyneside sentiment."

More significantly, the hon. Gentleman said that there should be a public inquiry into the MOD's plans for Otterburn. He must have known that, if his call for an inquiry had come to fruition, it would have delayed the vital expansion of the Otterburn training range for two or three years. What kind of action is that from someone who speaks of the need for our troops to be properly trained?

A few days later, in the House, the hon. Gentleman asked the Secretary of State to give an assurance that the troops in Bosnia would be properly equipped with, among other weapons, the AS90 gun, which he has tried to stop the Royal Artillery from using on the Otterburn training ranges.

Local people support the Army 100 per cent., but one detail needs to be resolved: the method of transporting heavy weapons such as the AS90 and the Warriors to and from the Otterburn training ranges. We must ensure that the good will of those local people is not dissipated by the lengthy disruption of their lives by those convoys: there must be proper negotiation between the MOD, the police and the Highways Agency to minimise that disruption. I am sure that careful planning and widespread consultation would make that possible.

The people of Northumberland gladly put up with low flying, and they put up with the Army in Otterburn. Indeed, they welcomed the Army, which has been there since 1911. They have done that mainly in the national interest. If consideration of the national interest is to prove helpful to the people of Northumberland, a couple of bypasses should be provided in Ponteland and Belsay to enable military vehicles to move to and from the training area. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister's response will be encouraging.

8.45 pm

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): I had flu recently. I hope that my speech will be audible; I also intend it to be short.

Like other Conservative Members, I found the speech of the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) regrettable and out of character. It was partisan, specious and fatuous, and said nothing about what Labour wanted to do. It hid behind a cloak of stating the obvious. All NATO countries have made cuts since the end of the cold war, which will inevitably cause disruption and uncertainty among those who serve until stability returns.

The hon. Member for Motherwell, North did not say what he would have done. Would he have suggested a different balance of forces at the end? Would he have suggested the introduction of more infantry and less cavalry, more air power or more sea power? Nothing in his speech was relevant to serving military officers or, indeed, armchair generals and admirals.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans), who spoke of the difference between Labour's defence policy and that of the Conservatives. Inevitably, Labour puts much more effort into providing social security than providing national security, and a nation without the will to defend itself is not really a nation but a collection of communities. As I may have said in another speech, a nation loses the will to survive if it cares more about providing a safety net than providing a security net. I hope that all hon. Members will think about that as the maniacs in the Club Med or elsewhere point their missiles increasingly at Europe, supposedly in support of their religious zeal in the Islamic or any other extremist or nationalist cause.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces made an excellent speech that covered a wide range. I particularly appreciated his response to an intervention by the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis). My brother is about to leave his battalion in Northern Ireland—he is in the Grenadier Guards—and I know that, with a difficult job ahead of him, he will take great comfort from the fact that my hon. Friend intends to ensure that soldiers in Northern Ireland are given the necessary training facilities so that they are busily and usefully employed.

A number of remarks have been made about recruitment. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces for the attention that he gave the subject in his speech, the careful consideration and answers that he has given it in Defence questions and the seriousness with which he views it. It is inevitable after a period of reductions in the armed forces and the—sometimes—enforced losing of men from various different branches of service that there will be a feeling abroad that the Army, the Navy and Air Force are shrinking, will therefore not need young people to join, and that in any case such a career might not last that long.

The work, the speech and indeed the actions of my hon. Friend the Minister will put that right. It will give young people the impression that there is a wonderful career to

[Mr. Andrew Hargreaves]

be had in the Army and the other services and that it is well worth joining up and making a major contribution to the country's interests.

No speech in this debate would be complete without recognising the extraordinary service of our Army, especially the infantry units which are now joined by the cavalry armoured units in Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia. I would add only that I have great respect for them. My hon. Friend the Minister put exactly the right colour on the matter by saying that we owe them a huge debt of gratitude. Although I am sure that all of us would have wished for it sooner, there is at last an extremely bright light on the horizon. It makes us very proud to see British troops carrying that light of peace forward and enabling the process to continue.

The announcement about the order for Army Land Rovers made by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement is extremely welcome, especially in my constituency where many people work at the Land-Rover plant down the road in Solihull. Although I know that my view will not be shared by my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), I do not think that it behoves Conservative Members to denigrate either of the contenders for the order.

The order was given to Land-Rover because its ambulance is cheaper to buy, cheaper to run, it has better medical facilities in it, it is easier to use for medical people and it has the significant advantage of having parts in common with the existing Land Rover fleet as well as the new Tul-Tum fleet which the Army has ordered. Such commonality is an important aspect to the order, although I do not in any way wish to denigrate the excellent contender that might have been produced by the Austrians. The order will be very good news for people in the west midlands. The order for the much larger Tul-Tum units will be equally welcome.

While I am on the subject of Army equipment, I ask my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement whether he will soon be able to announce the order of, for example, the Merlin Smart 81 mm mortar or—perhaps—the longer range anti-tank weaponry about which I know the Army is keen to hear. We all look forward to his speech with great interest. I am pleased to have had the opportunity to make a few remarks.

8.53 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Now that all the Opposition Back Benches have been deserted, we can have a serious debate about defence.

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): Silly man.

Mr. Key: The hon. Gentleman says, "Silly man", but I think that it is serious that not one Back Bencher from any Opposition party is present. The Conservative Members who have been sitting here for five hours waiting to speak have serious contributions to make to the debate.

One of the advantages of speaking late in the debate is that everything that should be said probably has been said, and one can just say, "We all agree." I must however congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces on his speech. It said everything that I would wish to say. I also thank him for his personal contribution to the raising of morale throughout the forces. It has been a great pleasure to see him fulfilling his role. He has done it seriously, but with a great sense of fun, which has made a great deal of difference to the armed forces and their families.

If the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) wonders why we minded so much about what he said, I should tell him quite simply that the tone, as well as the content, of his speech offended Conservative Members. I think that he will regret it. He has lost friends and smashed bridges, which is serious given that we all try to establish a bipartisan approach to defence matters in the House. Perhaps the worst that I can wish on him is that tomorrow morning the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) sends round the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) to give him a little spinning, because clearly the mask has slipped.

I have worked with more than 20 Defence Ministers in my time as a Member of Parliament. They come and they go—as do commanders in chief, generals, admirals, air marshals, and private officers in the Ministry of Defence. I say with complete confidence that we have the best team of Ministers with whom I have worked. I have heard it said in the field by troops, from generals, socially in my constituency and among the retired military of all ranks, whom I am fortunate to have living in my constituency and to whom I listen. I am never short of advice, and I appreciate it.

Morale became low in the forces quickly after the Gulf war, but there is no doubt that it is so much better now. The forces are professional, well equipped, well trained, well motivated, proud of the past, proud of their current role and held in the highest esteem worldwide. I am immensely proud of our service men of all three services. Let us not forget the service men and women in Northern Ireland and Germany, who, as well as those in Bosnia, are all doing their duty.

Defence research is often underestimated. It is quite clear that these days wars are won through intelligence and science and technology, as well as by training and people. This year £550 million has been spent on defence research and that is a substantial sum. The Defence Evaluation and Research Agency has a £1 billion turnover and 12,000 staff, and is the largest physics-based research grouping in western Europe. That is something of which we can be immensely proud.

In my constituency, the Defence Test and Evaluation Organisation is at Boscombe Down and the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is at Porton Down. Their contribution is of inestimable value. It was good news to hear that the Defence Research Agency, as it was called, saved £100 million over two years in its running costs—and quite right, too. I am a little concerned, however, that applied research must save some £20 million a year, and I certainly wish the Ministry of Defence well in seeking to save £30 million a year by increasing the amount of collaborative and non-departmental work. I hope very much that it can achieve that—but it would be quite an achievement.

I give my strong support for the Ministry of Defence wealth-creation initiative. The recent dual-use technology centres will bring a new and refreshing atmosphere to structural material centres, super-computing, thermal imaging, maritime technology, software engineering,

information technology and robotics. Behind all that are people and families, who are part of our all communities. Sometimes people think of the armed forces as just those soldiers they see on television every day or those involved in trooping the colour. In fact, they are an immensely important part of our entire civilian community as well.

Behind every uniformed member of the forces is at least one non-uniformed member of Ministry of Defence staff. In my constituency, I have about 5,000 uniformed personnel and about 5,000 civilian employees. They use our services, schools and health service, which is a very good thing. We also should not forget the Navy, Army and Air Force Institute in Amesbury and all that it is doing, or the warehouse in Grantham that will shortly be opened and which will boost the NAAFI's massive operation. It is a huge retail operation, of which any of the high street supermarkets would be proud. The NAAFI does much more. It operates in times of war as well as times of peace, and provides everything from television sets to tea.

The social side of the Army is important and must not be forgotten. My hon. Friend the Minister has mentioned the Federation of Army Wives, but I shall be keeping a close watch on the new Housing Executive as it starts to fulfil a difficult role.

The hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) said that we were now free of the burdens of empire. We are not quite free of those burdens. When I visited Hong Kong in September—the visit is declared in the Register of Members' Interests as having been financed by the Government of Hong Kong—I met members of the British military forces out there, such as the chief of staff, and I talked to a number of people. I was distressed to hear of the damage being done to Britain's reputation as we move towards the handover to China in relation to a small number of Hong Kong residents who have worked for many years at British military establishments there as a part of the locally engaged work force.

Those people are a unique, ring-fenced group of Hong Kong citizens who, as a condition of their employment by British military forces, had to sign a contract that specifically transferred their loyalty from the Government of Hong Kong to the British sovereign power. In real and practical terms, they were fully signed-up Brits. In the distribution of 50,000 British passports to Hong Kong citizens, they received no special treatment, yet they are very special and deserve to be recognised as such. They are people on whom the British forces of all services have relied for many years.

I wrote to the Home Secretary about those people on 25 September. The wheels of the Home Office grind slowly, and I have yet to receive a response. I hope that the response will be positive.

I congratulate the chief executive of the New Defence Estates Organisation on his third annual report. It is something that the Army has to live with—and in. It has 706 historic buildings, 606 of which are in England, which makes life pretty tricky if one is trying to train a modern army. The new approach is much appreciated, and I congratulate the Army.

Finally, may I raise a small but important point; perhaps it is this sort of thing that will help to encourage morale among service families. It is perhaps because of the 5,000 soldiers in my constituency, many of whom move in and out of this country with their families, that I am receiving a growing trickle of letters about our pet quarantine regulations. Our tough rabies laws have protected this country successfully for a long time. However, the report of the Agriculture Select Committee has convinced me that we need a fresh approach.

I have always been a strong supporter of our vigilant stance against rabies—that is not in question. The evidence of the Select Committee, together with its unanimous recommendations, has forced me to change my mind. Since 1972, 160,000 pets have been through quarantine and death has occurred in 2,500 cases, without a single case of rabies. I believe that we now need a system that is based on vaccination, antibody testing and approved identification with electronic tagging for pet dogs and cats which arrive from rabies-free and approved countries. The heartache among service families should not be underestimated. It is a major factor in their morale and finances. The law-abiding and pet-loving people and their pets are, as ever, the ones who are penalised.

In 1992, the European Commission's Scientific Veterinary Committee produced a report which said that it was

> "of the opinion that cats and dogs vaccinated with inactivated vaccines which conformed to European pharmacopoeia standards, at at least three months of age, do not present a risk of spreading rabies provided that they are symptom-free at least four months after the initial vaccination."

It also told the commission that if 1,000 dogs were imported each year from France to the United Kingdom, even without passing through the quarantine system, one could expect that, on average, a dog incubating rabies might enter this country once every 1,250 years.

That issue must be looked at. I make that plea on behalf of my service constituents. It is a small point at the end of an important debate on the Army, but I hope that my hon Friends on the Front Bench will take it seriously.

9.3 pm

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key). He was entirely right to draw attention to the fact that we have a superb team at the Ministry of Defence. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently paid a highly successful visit to the middle east, my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement is doing an extremely good job and batting for Britain to boot, and, if my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces will permit me to say so, he is known throughout the armed forces as a class act in our so-called classless society.

I listened with great interest to my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire (Sir A. Grant), who described himself as one of the few old soldiers left in the House. I agree wholeheartedly with a number of his remarks. In particular, we share his delight in the decision to award the contract to Land-Rover.

I listened with interest, but some disappointment, to the remarks of the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid). Hon. Members who have listened to the hon. Gentleman in previous debates will know that he was not on good form tonight. He cannot believe for a moment that there would be any compulsion on jobcentres to send people into the services, particularly the Army. That is utter nonsense and was dealt with first by my hon. Friend

[Mr. Matthew Banks]

the Minister for the Armed Forces when the hon. Gentleman was not listening, and by my hon. Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement.

Several of my hon. Friends and the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) mentioned the Army Cadet Force, which I agree is not simply about Army recruiting. It is also a means by which young people can be acquainted with the armed forces, particularly the Army. I believe that, over a number of years, the cadet force makes them better citizens and we should continue to support it. I do not agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) that we should spend more on it—we are getting good value for money.

I should like to pick up a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire. It is important that many hon. Members take part in the parliamentary armed forces scheme. I keep getting letters from Colonel Thorne, who is a former hon. Member, and I keep telling him that I was in the Army, but he still writes to me. I am probably being told that I should spend some time with the Royal Navy or the Royal Air Force. It is clear that hon. Members have benefited a great deal from that scheme.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre that we made a mistake in doing away with the Junior Leaders Infantry Battalion.

I was interested in what the hon. Member for Motherwell, North had to say about Army recruiting. I was not so concerned about jobcentres becoming involved in recruitment. It is entirely right that the Ministry of Defence should examine the way in which service recruiting centres have operated, and may operate in future, and consider what changes might be made.

If I might make one constructive criticism, it is that regimental headquarters should have a little more support in keeping the Army in the public eye. My hon. Friends on the Front Bench know full well that I disagree totally with the merger of the Gordon Highlanders and the Queen's Own Highlanders. Perhaps they will take on board some constructive criticism now that it is water under the bridge. If we change the method of recruiting, we must ensure that the regimental teams have sufficient petrol and vehicles that work to get them round the countryside. When my hon. Friends consider the vast areas of Scotland that have to be covered, they will understand that I am making a constructive point.

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend has raised an important point, and I share his concerns. He will acknowledge that performance of different regiments is extremely varied. Some regiments do well; others do not. The Chief of the General Staff and the Army Board are considering what guidance they can give individual regiments to establish a more standardised process, not in terms of tying them up, but to help them get the very best out of the resources that are available for recruitment. My hon. Friend is on to an extremely good point.

Mr. Banks: I want to follow the example of other hon. Members, to whom I am grateful, and be brief in order to allow those who want to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to have the opportunity to contribute, but I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks.

It is 12 months since we last debated this subject. While there is no direct threat on our doorstep, there is still considerable risk in the world. The nature and direction of that risk is fluid and unpredictable. At the beginning of the decade, it lay in Baghdad, but we can now identify risks in the Balkans. I am conscious, however, that we may be receiving intelligence reports that suggest that there is a further build-up of forces within Iraqi borders, about which we should all be concerned. My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre and others who drew attention to that were entirely right to say that we have to be careful about cost savings. The defences of the United Kingdom and of our allies are vital.

Much discussion has focused on the institutional and bureaucratic mechanisms by which the European Union might implement policy decisions involving some sort of military action by member states. Our contribution to European security has been, and will remain, unique and substantial. As long as nations have experience of working together in some context, such as NATO or the conventional forces in Europe talks, they can work together in another organisational context.

Any attempts at reorganising European defence purely for political reasons, therefore—especially any fanciful notion of equalising the importance of NATO and the Western European Union—must be subordinated to the continuing examination of future challenges and to the proper equipment of our forces with the necessary hardware at the best possible prices. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will remember those comments, come the intergovernmental conference later this year.

There will soon be more than 13,000 British troops stationed in Bosnia—the largest contribution to the peace effort after the United States. They form part of NATO's first land operation in almost 50 years of existence and are led by a British General, Sir Michael Walker. Their objectives seem to be clearer than was formerly the case in Bosnia. They are there primarily to help and persuade, by their very presence as well as their actions, the warring factions to stick to the Dayton agreement.

I hope that no military action will be necessary, but our troops should be given every chance to defend themselves, within the NATO rules of engagement, from any attack. They are not going to Bosnia to fight a heroic battle or to fight other people's battles. They will leave their mark on military history. After all, as Milton wrote:

"Peace hath her victories
No less renowned than war."

I do not believe that we have heard anything about Labour's plans for the future. All we have heard about is the defence review. For a number of years, we have heard Labour party conference motions for £4 billion-worth of cuts—equivalent to some 40 infantry battalions.

Dr. Reid: Forty battalions?

Mr. Banks: Well, £4 billion is a lot of money and troops are expensive. It is about time that the hon. Gentleman started to pick up on one or two simple points of arithmetic.

What is the point of having a review? To hide the fact that the Labour party has no policy and that it is interested only in making further and deeper cuts. I wish I had time to pursue that point, but I must end by saying that, listening to Opposition Members tonight, particularly the

hon. Member for Motherwell, North, I have no doubt that the defence of this country is still not safe—nor would it be safe—in Labour hands.

9.13 pm

Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes (Wimbledon): First, I must apologise for the fact that other commitments have made my attendance at this debate intermittent. May I also say how much I enjoyed the exposition of defence policy by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces—both the content and, to echo the words of my colleagues, the style to which we have become accustomed. It was in marked contrast to the essentially parochial concerns expressed from the Opposition Benches.

There has been so much good news on the wide deployment and effectiveness of our forces, on the respect in which they are held and on their operational ability and flexibility, that I hope that it will not be considered churlish to highlight one or two concerns, which are held by several Conservative Members, that have already been expressed. I hope that, against a background of the inadequacy or absence of any Opposition policy, such observations are constructive.

The equipment situation is admirable. A progressively higher proportion of the defence budget is being spent on the highly sophisticated weaponry about which we have heard so much today. Our men have been given the kit that they want, to an extent that is the envy of the world. Indeed, we now have the world's best professional soldiers with the best professional kit. I doubt whether any socialist-run economy—overlaid with its particular political priorities—could possibly have achieved that.

I am sure that my hon. Friends agree, however, that the manpower situation is far from satisfactory. We have gone through all of the arguments about the right size for the Army, and the original "Options for Change" figures were—thank goodness—revised upwards, so that battalions earmarked for amalgamation were saved. The fact remains, as my hon. Friend the Minister said today, that there is a shortfall of around 2,000 men now, which is expected to increase to around 4,000 in 1997. That is a slow but alarming haemorrhage.

The Government may have been victims of their own success in reducing unemployment generally, thus decreasing the pool available for recruitment to the armed forces. My hon. Friend the Minister will be making sterling efforts to discredit the ridiculous myth that redundancies at the latter end of a military career mean that there is less need for young recruits to the Army at the outset. My hon. Friend will be educating the public about that obvious fallacy in the advertising campaign that he has announced today.

I understand that the trend towards closing recruiting offices is being reversed, and I hope that my hon. Friend agrees that there is no substitute for a recruiting sergeant, who is suitably sponsored and self-motivated, to gain recruits for his regiment. Indeed, the regimental system depends on geographical links and personal contact. I also believe that there are moves to reinstate the concept of junior leaders, but I am not certain that that subject has been addressed in today's debate. After all, it is probable that very few regimental sergeant majors did not start their career in that way. I would welcome my hon. Friend's advice as to the form and timing of any proposals—which I believe would be enlightened ones—to bring back junior leaders in one form or another.

One factor that detracts from the quality of life of service men is the emergency tour interval. I do not apologise for bringing up the issue again. Ever since "Options for Change", the confident aspiration has been for the interval between tours to be 24 months. In 1992, it was described as the minimum, but later it was described as a target for 1995-96. Today, my hon. Friend admitted that, owing to extra commitments, 20 months is more likely to be the figure that we can achieve for infantry battalions.

The House will recognise that someone who is motivated to be a soldier expects to put his skills to good use and does not want to be kicking his heels in a barracks. For single young men, the attractions of service life in a variety of theatres and roles is obvious. The problem is that wives, young families and regular girl friends understandably find such separations intolerable. I doubt, and have always doubted, that the 24-month tour interval is ever achievable. It certainly will not be if the manning problem continues, and I wish my hon. Friend every success in the measures that he has announced today to counteract that problem.

In some specialist units, such as the sappers, the emergency tour interval is as low as 12 months and, in some individual cases, soldiers with a particular expertise have been working on a back-to-back basis. The problem is magnified when we have such an enormous percentage of forces who are either training, on operations or retraining. The House will know that the percentage involved in such activities is the highest since the end of the second world war.

May I broaden the debate to a slightly more international basis? While history will mark down NATO as the most successful military organisation ever, the fact that it has achieved its ends owes precisely nothing to having been undermined for years by Opposition Members who were members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, even if they now choose to forget or hide the fact.

Shortly before the end of the cold war, I visited the newly formed Franco-German brigade at Böblingen. I assumed that it was only a political gesture but, in eulogies to the late President Mitterrand that we have all read recently, it was perceived as one of his and Chancellor Kohl's greatest achievements. I find it difficult to disagree, for it has developed into the 50,000-strong Eurocorps, no less, based in Strasbourg. That was no political gesture, but an affirmation of a Franco-German axis.

The traditional balance of power might be better served by developing the entente cordiale. We now have a bewildering proliferation of military organisations, for which one almost needs a glossary. Eurocorps has been joined by EUROFOR, now EUROMARFOR, and the rapid reaction corps, and now the Western European Union aspires to become the defence arm of the European Union.

As we approach the intergovernmental conference, I trust that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will resist precipitate pressure for a common security and defence policy. According to Commissioner van den Broek, whom I challenged on the subject the other day, such a policy is compatible, first, with the neutrality of countries such as Ireland, Finland, Austria and Sweden, and, secondly, with enlargement of the

[Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes]

European Union to up to 30 members with qualified majority voting. The only slight morsel that he tossed me was to say, in a patronising way, that countries with a colonial past would have certain exemptions.

That is political, let alone military, nonsense. I am confident that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will get the priorities right. He will get our armed forces trained, equipped and motivated as this nation wants them. Only then will we be in a position to co-operate with other countries, in that national interest, as circumstances arise in this uncertain world.

9.22 pm

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Every time that I prepare a speech for a defence or foreign affairs debate, I prepare one of Palmerstonian proportions, because I know that the House looks forward to everything that I have to say. Tonight, as always, I shall compress my remarks into the few moments left to me so that others may have an opportunity to speak.

Normally, I am entertained by the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid), who gives a good wind-up speech. Sadly, this evening, he made his after-dinner speech before tea and it lost much in the telling.

In the few moments available, I wish to make some positive points. First, I want to praise the armed forces parliamentary scheme. Much as I should like to, I shall not give the House a Cook's tour of my travels over the past 18 months, although I would have done so had the Palmerstonian rule applied. Instead, I shall briefly mention some of the units that I have visited, and sing their praises.

I visited 24 Air Mobile Brigade in Colchester, which contained elements of the first battalion of the Royal Anglians, my constituency regiment. It is an excellent line regiment, which has done valiant service in both Bosnia and other theatres. I also visited 5 Airborne Brigade on a logistics parachute exercise on Salisbury plain. My visit was interrupted because the brigade had suddenly to be transported to Rwanda, but that demonstrates the versatility of our modern armed forces in war and in peace.

I was lucky enough to go to Northern Ireland, where I visited the headquarters staff. I also visited the first battalion of the Princess of Wales Royal Regiment in Omagh. Again, that was an excellent experience for an overweight barrister such as myself. I went to the Falklands where I met members of all three services, who were doing excellent work in the south Atlantic—a long way from home—without complaint.

I have been to the military corrective training centre at Colchester most recently. It is an excellent place which will shortly be able to receive civilian young offenders, where they will learn much and benefit from the advice and training provided by the military staff. Perhaps most esoterically, I deliberately went to the Defence Animal Centre in Melton Mowbray, which is a few miles from my house. There, I practised my mounted sword drill. I challenge my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces to bring his charger to New Palace Yard and we will compare our abilities with swords on horseback.

Sir Jim Spicer: That will sort him out.

Mr. Garnier: It might well sort him out.

At the Defence Animal Centre, or the Remount Depot as it used to be fondly called, I discovered the Prime Minister's Azeri stallion. That may be of interest to my hon. Friend the Minister.

Mr. Soames: Yes, I have seen it.

Mr. Garnier: I thought my hon. Friend had. It is an excellent animal and, in the event that it is available for sale, it would suit my daughter very well.

From the parliamentary armed forces scheme, I have learned about the tremendous range of abilities, from good to excellent, that we find in all ranks of the armed forces, from the youngest private soldier to the most senior starred rank. All ranks are imbued with excellent common sense, an attribute that we cannot always claim in the House.

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) mentioned the vexed question of homosexuality in the armed forces. My impression, from the many soldiers to whom I have spoken, is that their common sense tells them that it would not be a good idea to alter the arrangements for homosexuals in the armed forces, especially in the Army. I ask the Government to listen to the soldier, because he is the man who has to live with their decision.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces mentioned national vocational qualifications. They are an excellent idea. There are far too many good soldiers leaving the Army after five or 10 years, 20 years for NCOs, who have nothing to show for their time but their years of experience. Of course, many of them will have medals for gallantry and all of them will have good conduct reports, but to impress the potential civilian employer, they need some form of educational certificate to demonstrate that they are not only good soldiers but good future employees.

Much has been said about Army recruiting centres. The security risk in Northern Ireland and Great Britain is now much diminished. From my experience in over 43 years of life, I know that the careers offices were good shop windows for the armed forces. I hope that the tri-service careers offices will be able to make their mark so that civilians and the Army can meet and so that the Army can become an ordinary item in the high street. The mystique of the Army must be removed, so that citizens can see it at work in the high street.

I trust that my thoughts have not been too garbled. On the subject of procurement, many hon. Members have mentioned the military ambulance order and Land-Rover. I wish to make a constituency point on behalf of King Trailers, which manufactures trailers. The company is capable of manufacturing military tank transporters and other towed vehicles for military use and, indeed, for civilian use. I urge the Government to keep an eye on that excellent company, which produces goods for the domestic and export markets and is a major employer in my constituency.

We have had a long and interesting debate and I have played only a small part. I trust that the Government will keep in mind the importance of the armed forces and understand that we Conservatives know that the Opposition are unfit to govern and to have any say in the way that our armed forces are run.

9.29 pm

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): This has been a wide-ranging debate, which my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) opened by dealing with the broad issues facing the Army. I shall concentrate more on procurement issues. First, however, I should like to deal with some of the points raised in the debate; I apologise in advance to hon. Members whose points I do not mention.

The Minister entertained us with the exploits of Corporal Coull. I was uncertain as to whether he would offer that as an example of how to settle disputes in political parties—perhaps he would pass it on to his colleagues. There was also some debate about the jobseeker's allowance, and a welcome intervention from the hon. Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot). It would be useful if he passed on his comments to the Department for Education and Employment, so that they could be sent out as advice and so that any dubiety or lack of clarity could be removed.

At one stage, discussing the ambulances order, the Minister came under friendly fire from the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), who seemed wholly disoriented by the defection from sycophancy of her previous employer, Express Newspapers—but she will, I am sure, get over it.

The right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Sir A. Hamilton) repeated the party line about abuse from my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North. It did not seem justified by my hon. Friend's speech. The right hon. Gentleman went on to imply that retired officers who criticised the Government are senile, which seemed to dilute his message somewhat.

We are pleased to welcome back the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), Chairman of the Defence Committee, and to hear his points about the excellent report produced by that Committee on the Gulf war syndrome—points echoed by the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) and by my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen).

The hon. and learned Gentleman then drew attention to problems of redundancy. It is important to stress them, not just because of the costs involved but also—this came into the speech by the hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir J. Spicer)—because the best recruiting agent is often someone who has been in the forces and enjoyed a fulfilling and constructive time there. Equally, it is not a good advertisement for youngsters looking for a career to see someone who has been given his P45 for compulsory redundancy from the forces. That should be taken into account when the plans are being drawn up. As the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) said, the closure of careers offices and compulsory redundancies send out all the wrong signals.

The hon. Member for Wyre also rightly drew attention to the value of the cadet movement, pointing out the disparity between the money spent on that movement and the positive results that it achieves, and the huge costs when youngsters go wrong and have to be put in secure accommodation. Unfortunately, he then felt the need to offer an officially approved soundbite. It often seems that, once Conservative Members have made some sensible points, they feel the need to create a diversion so that their activities will not be reported back by the Whips. They therefore throw some abuse around—but we understand why they do it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton rightly drew our attention to the position of war widows. The Ministry of Defence deals with them extremely well in the main, and with great care and consideration. That does not mean that we should ignore cases when it seems to have fallen below its usually excellent standards. I am sure that the Minister took the point on board and will refer to it in future.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) drew attention to the death by a thousand cuts to which the forces have been steadily subjected, contrasting that with some of the more outrageous statements made by Tory Members. It was of value to the House to hear him draw on his considerable experience in Bosnia.

The hon. Member for West Dorset also drew our attention to an article in today's *Daily Express*. I was slightly surprised that he stopped the quotation where he did, because it went on to say of the Secretary of State:

"But we can, I hope, also expect him to show a wider sense of history than his Prime Minister and some of his historically ignorant colleagues."

The hon. Member for West Dorset went on, rightly, to draw attention to the training role of the Army. Some of his proposals are worthy of examination because there should not be only a single route to training. In the past, the Army has provided, especially for technical training, valuable experience for many youngsters. We took on board his point about the ability of the armed forces to draw the attention of children in schools to careers in the armed forces.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. Hargreaves) also went in for the soundbite, but at the end of his speech mentioned the Army field ambulances. He went slightly over the top in his attacks on the Labour party and Labour Governments. I gently remind him that it was a Tory Government who, before the last war, ran down defences—against the advice of the grandfather of the Minister of State for the Armed Forces—a coalition that won the war and Labour that took us into NATO.

The hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) rightly drew attention to the excellent work of the defence research establishments. We all want to pay tribute to those as centres of excellence and welcome their increasing dual-use for civilian and military technology, which as the hon. Gentleman knows, works more fully in both directions than it has in the past as technology has developed.

The announcement today of the orders for Land Rover was good news for British industry and in the case of the ambulances, it was a welcome climbdown by the Ministry of Defence. On a matter of detail, I ask the Minister to reply now, or later by correspondence, as to whether any of the new vehicles are replacements for the ill-fated RB44, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden).

More generally, why did it require hon. Members from both sides of the House, some of whom are here tonight, to create uproar for the MOD to recognise the qualities of Land-Rover? The decision would have been self-evident in other countries.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Today's announcement about Land Rover vehicles does not replace the RB44. They are steadily coming back into service as they are repaired.

Mr. Spellar: I thank the Minister for that clarification.

[Mr. Spellar]

The argument over the Army field ambulance is a symbol of what is wrong with the Government's unbalanced general procurement policy. I am pleased that the Minister of State for Defence Procurement will reply for the Government. We thought that there would be some movement when the previous Minister, the right hon. Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman), gave evidence to the joint Select Committees on Defence and Trade and Industry in May, as was mentioned by the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside. The right hon. Member for Kettering said:

"the Ministry of Defence needs to continue to give due consideration to the possible consequences of procurement decisions for the defence industrial base and I am happy to affirm this once again."

We also hoped that there would be a positive response to the joint report of the Defence and Trade Industry Committees, which drew attention to many of those points. I am afraid that our hopes were misplaced. In a parliamentary answer on 9 January, the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, in talking about the white vehicles contract, stated:

"the criteria for the selection of the winning bid is based on best value for money, which includes technical and commercial competence"—[*Official Report*, 9 January 1996; Vol. 269, c. *104*.]

Such an attitude is widespread throughout Whitehall because on 11 January the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim), said of the field ambulance order:

"contracts . . . will quite rightly be based primarily on value for money and operational considerations."—[*Official Report*, 11 January 1996; Vol. 269, c. *295*.]

Those are, of course, important considerations, but they are incomplete. The Government are trying to construct a two-legged stool. There is an important third leg, the maintenance of Britain's defence industrial base. It is recognised by the Labour party, in our document, "Strategy for a Secure Future" and by the joint report of the Select Committees on Defence and on Trade Industry, "Aspects of Defence Procurement and Industrial Policy", which states:

"We recommend that MOD endorse the view that National Security depends on a strong economy as well as strong armed forces and that it has an important role in contributing to that economic strength. We further recommend that MOD make the maintenance of the technology base of the UK defence industries a priority, and that consideration of this factor be built into the procurement process from the initial stages right through to the decision to order the equipment".

That is recognised by defence industry firms and their employees. In its evidence, the Defence Manufacturers Association said:

"MOD's procurement policies are seen as verging on the hostile to the indigenous industrial base and there is no clear defence industrial policy against which British industry can negotiate R&D co-operation from a position of strength."

It is the practice, formally or informally, of our major industrial competitors and the minor players to operate in that way. It is this Administration, with its time-warped, dogmatic approach, that is out of step. The Government are dominated by far-right dogma, conducting their theological debates to the exclusion of the country's real problems. It is very reminiscent of the Labour party in the early 1980s.

We must ask: when will the Government learn from the successful countries and companies in the real world, where partnership between supply and customers is the increasing pattern? The Government seem to take an almost Orwellian stance on the issue: two legs good, three legs bad. We do not expect them to change completely; we will offer them a way out. The Government may say, "Two legs good, three legs better." They will then have a balanced procurement policy.

The Land-Rover example provides another major lesson. The Rover group, its employees and their unions have worked together increasingly as a partnership to compete in the global market. That partnership is replicated in many other defence firms across the country. Their message to Government is the same as the message from the Select Committee: partnership at industry level must be matched by long-term partnership between industry and the MOD. That is how we shall ensure that our forces get the equipment that they need and deserve, that taxpayers get value for money and that Britain's defence industry can punch its weight in the international marketplace.

The ideological approach that is adopted in so many areas is leading to some interesting, if extremely perverse, conclusions. In pursuit of the holy grail of the free market, the MOD is putting at a disadvantage the now private sector Royal Ordnance compared with some of its overseas competitors. In the words of the Select Committee, those competitors are

"nationalised or otherwise subsidised with protected home markets and thus frequently able to quote for UK orders at or below marginal cost".

That is without the activities of Mr. Gordon Foxley and his corrupt cohorts, who made the situation worse. That led to the purchase of duff ammunition and to disaster for the Blackburn ordnance factory. The Minister will also be aware of the considerable disquiet about the below-cost order for target ammunition from Portugal for Bisley. That has again had an effect on one of our ordnance factories.

We understand that the 81 mm mortar order, worth £100 million, is just around the corner. The product was sold previously to 40 countries, including the United States in the face of a "buy American" policy. Yet our firms must face a "sell Britain short" policy. Its prime architect is the Secretary of State's pal, David Hart, whose philosophy was summed up in a line of his article which appeared in *The Spectator* on 6 February 1993. In the article, he talked about purchasing F15s and fitting new avionics in Britain, so that

"British Aerospace can stay in business, if it must".

What a dismissive attitude to adopt to Britain's top exporter, and what a revealing comment about Mr. Hart's attitude to Britain's industrial base.

The Government's policy is also adrift of reality in relation to the sale of the married quarters estate. The current indications from mortgage companies point towards some level of upturn in house prices, which will continue into next year. We know that they do not have the best prediction record, but it would be a bold Minister who would go on the record tonight as forecasting a further decline in house prices—especially in light of the Prime Minister's assurances on Tuesday.

If we are to believe the *Evening Standard*, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces has not been too successful in his efforts to sell his flat, so he knows the problems

that abound in the property market. However, at the possible bottom of the price cycle, the MOD is rushing at breakneck speed into a sale of its housing. If a company did that, the pundits would view it as a sign of impending bankruptcy.

The situation is worse than that. The MOD is also committed to an open-ended contract, whereby it will pay either a fixed sum or an aggregate of total market rents—whichever is the higher—while the rent assessment officers and the tribunals are pushing up rents well above the rate of inflation and the increase in the cost of housing. We do not even know whether NAPNOC—no acceptable price, no contract—will apply. It is the give-away sale of the century.

Who will benefit? The forces will not benefit. They are known to be very concerned about the disruptive effect of the scheme, especially for relocation of troops in future. The service men would probably do far better under the discounted sales scheme. It appears from a parliamentary answer to me today that the scheme is at risk. The answer reads:

"The future of the scheme is being evaluated in the context of the proposals to transfer the married quarters estate to the private sector."

As the answer makes clear, the scheme has been popular with service personnel.

People who are looking for rented homes in the area will not benefit. Even local builders may be undermined if faced with possible release of property in the area. We are faced with a dogma-driven exercise, probably pushed by the right-wing guru, David Hart. The prospectus of the MOD for purchases makes that clear. It reads:

"The Government is determined to sustain"—

Mr. Arbuthnot: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Spellar: Yes.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Is the Labour party committed to the married quarters estates sale? Would it reverse it? What would it do about it?

Mr. Spellar: I thought that I had made it clear that the last thing anyone would do now would be to sell property at the bottom of the market and then put it out on the basis of market rents, as they increased—*[Interruption.]* The Minister is trying to shout me down. It seems that he is desperate to sell now and pay later. He is not even—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am trying to listen to the hon. Member but the Minister is not.

Mr. Spellar: I think that the Minister did not like the thought of what the next passage would be. We are told that the Government

"is determined to sustain the revival in the private rented sector that deregulation has achieved. We will encourage more investors into the market, legislating to allow investment trusts to be created, making institutional investment in rented housing more attractive. We shall further deregulate private renting to reduce the burdens on small landlords."

That is what it is all about. These matters are driven not by defence needs but by Tory dogma. To paraphrase the words of the hon. Member for Wyre, it is the needs of estate agents, not those of the defence estate, that are driving the policy.

We have dwelt, inevitably, on our criticisms of the operations of MOD and of Ministers in matters that divide us. We should not, however, let our criticisms obscure the matters that unite us. There is a determination on both sides of the House to ensure the defence of the United Kingdom and to ensure that the men and women who undertake that task have the best training and equipment possible. Finally, there is our pride in the record of our troops as they fulfil their duties at home and abroad.

9.47 pm

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. James Arbuthnot): It has been a privilege to take part in the debate. With the exception of one speech, it has been a debate of exceptionally high quality. Accordingly, I do not want to waste too much time on what must surely have been one of the most small-minded speeches made by the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) that I have heard in the House. He demeaned himself and, sadly, with it, the House. I hope that he will not re-read it. If he does so, he will feel that he has not done himself justice.

The debate has raised a tremendous number of issues. Inevitably, I shall not be able to cover them all this evening. I shall ensure that either I or my hon. Friend the Minister of State will write to hon. Members to whose points I have not been able to respond.

We have heard many speeches of distinction, including those of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter), the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) and my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir J. Spicer), who made some constructive points about recruitment, as did my hon. Friends the Members for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) and for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. Hargreaves). I am particularly sad that I shall not be able to reply in detail to the excellent points that were made, on a wide range of matters, by my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), but time does not permit it.

It is has been a helpful debate because it has given me the opportunity to say something about defence procurement policy, which has attracted a good deal of interest recently, and rightly so. It is the key to ensuring that the Army and other services have the equipment that they need to carry out the many tasks required of them and to obtain the best value for the taxpayers' money.

The 1995 public expenditure survey settlement reflects the Government's firm belief in strong defence and the rigorous management of money provided by the taxpayer. The new plans affirm our determination to maintain a period of stability in defence planning, which is vital to the long-term decisions that are necessary for defence. My hon. Friends the Members for Southport (Mr. Banks) and for Wyre (Mr. Mans) were quite right in what they said about the need for stability.

But we cannot be complacent about what will happen over the next few years, because a healthy and technologically advanced defence industry is an important national asset, and I will not allow the Labour party to suggest that we think otherwise. We do not take its continuation for granted. As a Government, we take a

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keen interest in the health of the United Kingdom's defence industry, although we do not share the protectionist and dirigiste tendencies of some of our allies, or of the Labour party. We monitor the effects of our procurement policies and have regular contacts with industry at all levels, and we listen to the concerns of industry.

An important contribution to the debate in that area has been the recent joint report by the Select Committees on Defence and on Trade and Industry, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) referred. The report was thoughtful, wide-ranging and extremely constructive. My Department and the Department of Trade and Industry are considering it carefully and the Government will respond to the Committees shortly. I do not want to pre-empt that response, but it might be useful if I say a few words about some of the current issues.

First, on equipment collaboration, as the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) said, in a thoughtful and considered speech, the rising cost of defence equipment and reductions in defence expenditure have made collaboration in equipment procurement an increasingly important means of keeping costs down. It also provides opportunities for UK industry to enter new markets and to create new alliances. That is underlined by the large number of current collaborative equipment programmes with our European partners. We are involved in some 25 projects with France; 22 with Germany. Other significant European partners include Italy and The Netherlands.

I met my German opposite number, Herr Jörg Schönbohm, in London this morning to discuss areas of co-operation, and we discussed yesterday's announcement by the German defence Minister of Germany's intention to increase its commitment to Eurofighter from 140 to 180 aircraft, which we very much welcome. We agreed that that resolves the question of production work sharing, subject to the settlement of some details by officials of the four partner nations, and it will provide a firm basis for planning by industry and the partner nations for the commencement of future phases of the project. I know that the House and my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre will agree that that is excellent news for the Eurofighter project and for British industry.

Collaboration with European partners is often easiest to arrange. There are fewer problems when partners are of roughly equal size. But we also welcome opportunities to collaborate with the United States. As in Europe, successful collaboration is often rooted in strong commercial relationships between the industries concerned. The UK defence industry has many links with US companies, and we hope that these will continue to provide a basis for further co-operation. We certainly do not see collaboration as confined to Europe. Nor do we see it as a goal in itself. It is only one means by which we aim to maximise what we can achieve with the defence budget.

Our major aim must continue to be to seek maximum value from the defence budget. That underlies all our procurement activity. Over the past decade, our policies have undoubtedly been highly successful in securing that. They have also made a major contribution to turning UK defence industries into the effective and internationally competitive businesses that they are today.

Exports play an important part in the role of defence industries. The recent performance of the UK defence companies in achieving overseas orders has been excellent. Provisional results for 1995 suggest that, in a world market that has reduced in size by around 10 per cent. compared with 1994, UK export orders are up by around 10 per cent. to some £5 billion. That represents a welcome increase in the UK market share from under 16 per cent. in 1994 to some 19 per cent. in 1995. That is the second highest share ever achieved by the UK, and in performance it remains second only to the much larger United States defence industry.

That success is due not only to the growing competitiveness of UK defence companies, but it reflects the high standard of their products and the commitment of the defence export services organisation, the armed forces and Ministers in supporting companies in their efforts to win export business.

If we are to maintain that level of business in an increasingly competitive environment, industry and Government must continue to work together. To that end we have developed, with industry, a strategic plan. It identifies and prioritises the opportunities and sets out strategies for winning the available business, including finance and offset which are key elements in winning orders in today's market.

The Army's equipment has faced an extended and searching examination in recent years from the rigours of the terrain and climate of Bosnia. That has been referred to by my hon. Friends the Members for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson), for Wimbledon, and by my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Sir A. Hamilton). That equipment has passed with flying colours.

In last year's debate on the Army, my predecessor drew the attention of the House to the excellent performance of Warrior and our tracked armoured reconnaissance vehicles. Both they and the DROPS logistic vehicles have continued to perform extremely well. All types of armoured vehicle have been maintained at a high level of operational availability at all times.

Bosnia has also enabled my Department and industry to show their skill at responding quickly to urgent operational requirements. There have been many examples, but I want to single out the rapid development and deployment of the prototype HALO sound ranging equipment used for locating hostile artillery. The requirement was identified and agreed, a contract placed, and the system deployed within a matter of months. It made its first successful detection almost immediately. It is an excellent illustration of the speed and effectiveness of response by the MOD and industry working closely together with a common aim.

In opening the debate, my hon. Friend the Minister of State referred to our decisions on utility vehicles and ambulances. That matter has been raised by a number of my hon. Friends, including my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside, my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire (Sir A. Grant), my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green, and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden).

As regards the utility vehicles, two companies responded to the invitation to tender—Land-Rover and Steyr Daimler Puch. It was concluded that the Steyr Daimler Puch vehicle was too expensive and it was ruled out three years ago. However, following trials the Steyr vehicle was selected to meet the more demanding truck utility medium heavy duty requirement, and is now successfully in service. We have announced today an order for a further 65 of those vehicles which have proved to be excellent.

The Land Rover vehicle, known commercially as Defender XD, has been subjected to extensive and rigorous trialling in order to ensure that it can meet the high standards of reliability which are essential for operational military vehicles. Therefore, I am pleased to have been able to announce earlier today that, subject to the satisfactory completion of contractual negotiations, I propose to place an order with Land-Rover for about 8,000 vehicles. That order is worth about £170 million. It will bring substantial industrial and employment benefits to Land-Rover, and enhance the vehicle's already excellent prospects in export markets.

The battlefield ambulance programme has particular importance for the services. That has been discussed at some length today. It was a close contest. Both vehicles demonstrated excellent technical qualities, but the reasons for our deciding in favour of Land-Rover and for placing an order for some 800 ambulances with it have been well set out in the debate. The decision is good news for the armed forces and it will bring substantial industrial and employment benefits to Land-Rover and to Marshall of Cambridge.

We have heard of the pride of the United Kingdom in fulfilling its role in the world. The Government are determined to ensure that the UK will continue to earn the respect of others in all that we do, and that we will be well able to meet the challenges and changes that we must face.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Mineworkers (Bronchitis and Emphysema)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

10 pm

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): This debate concerns compensation for mineworkers suffering from chronic bronchitis and emphysema. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Will hon. Members leaving the Chamber do so quietly, please?

Mr. Clapham: I know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, from your involvement in the early 1970s in the fight to win compensation for victims of pneumoconiosis that you are well conversant with the matter. I am also aware that the Minister knows the arguments: over a period, we have corresponded on the matter of compensation for chronic bronchitis and emphysema.

For many years, the mining unions have sought to have chronic bronchitis and emphysema prescribed as industrial diseases by the Department of Social Security in relation to coal mining, and to have them included—this is part of the argument tonight—as compensatable diseases. I am advised that records show that the issue of compensation payments for the diseases was raised as long ago as the early 1940s. They have still not been realised.

It will be argued that the system of assessing disability as in the case of pneumoconiosis could form the basis of a compensation scheme. Therefore, it will be necessary tonight to explain the intricate connection between the two schemes.

As the Minister will be aware, in 1992, after a study of up-to-date evidence available, not only in England and from around the world, especially America and Belgium, the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council accepted that coal miners were more likely than individuals in the general population to contract chronic bronchitis and emphysema, and that therefore, on the balance of probability, the diseases were related to their occupation.

Eventually, on 13 September 1993—but, sadly, in the wake of the massive colliery closure programme—the Government implemented the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council recommendations in full, and prescribed chronic bronchitis and emphysema as PDD 12 in relation to the deep coal mining industry.

To be successful for an award under the DSS scheme, a claimant must first qualify by having worked underground for 20 years or more since 5 July 1948. I mention that because I recently dealt with the case of a man who had worked the length of the qualification period, but who had done so before 1948. He was ruled out because that period of qualification preceded the 1948 industrial injuries legislation. Perhaps that is something that needs to be reconsidered.

The claimant must next show that, on X-ray evidence, he has pneumoconiosis. Finally, he must have a loss of at least one litre of lung capacity as measured by the FEV 1 test. I am aware that that criterion is subject to a further

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review by the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council, and that that should be available shortly. I am also aware that that may well have an impact on what we are debating. I took that into consideration when calculating figures about compensation that I shall put to the Minister later.

If a claimant successfully negotiates all the hurdles to which I have referred, and is diagnosed as suffering from the disease and a resulting disability of 14 per cent. or more, he is awarded benefit for loss of faculty, along with a weekly pension. I must emphasise, however, that that is not compensation paid because the employer is in breach of either statutory or common law duty; nor is it a payment made by the industry in recognition of the existence of a foreseeable risk. It is a payment in recognition of the physical impairment of the claimant's lung function.

I strongly believe that miners suffering from chronic bronchitis and emphysema—terribly disabling diseases—should also be paid compensation by their employers, or former employers, under the coal industry's no-fault liability scheme, or pneumoconiosis compensation scheme, which was introduced by the Government in 1974 as part of their "Plan for Coal". However, because the nationalised industry insured its own risks, the scheme was to all intents and purposes a Government scheme. Since privatisation, the Coal Authority administers compensation schemes in regard to former miners' claims for pneumoconiosis.

There is an overwhelming case for miners who suffer from chronic bronchitis and emphysema. There are four main arguments. First, there is the issue of liability. I maintain that that issue has already been resolved by the introduction of the no-fault liability scheme for coal-dust-related diseases, which recognises the foreseeability of the risk.

The second argument is closely related to the first. The dust that causes pneumoconiosis also causes chronic bronchitis and emphysema. The foreseeability, and hence the risk, of anyone's contracting chronic bronchitis and emphysema is precisely the same as for pneumoconiosis. The liability issue is thus resolved.

The case of the Selwood brothers, constituents of mine, illustrates my point. The brothers have worked together in drivages for most their working lives; the three of them are now in their late seventies. One is a prescribed sufferer of pneumoconiosis at a level of 80 per cent., with an attendant 20 per cent. level of chronic bronchitis and emphysema. He receives an award from the Department of Social Security scheme based on a level of 100 per cent., because the Department rightly accepts that chronic bronchitis and emphysema worsen his pneumoconiosis. He also receives a payment under the coal industry pneumoconiosis compensation scheme.

His brothers, however—although diagnosed as suffering from chronic bronchitis and emphysema by the hospital consultant—receive no award. Even if they received one, under the DSS system they would not be eligible for a compensation payment. Yet the brother who has pneumoconiosis with attendant chronic bronchitis and emphysema has received a compensation payment. Although it is right that he should have received it, it is ridiculous that the others have not. It is one of the primary reasons why the coal industry pneumoconiosis compensation scheme should be extended to cover chronic bronchitis and emphysema.

I turn to the other two arguments. Most of the men who have received an award for chronic bronchitis and emphysema are elderly, and have neither the time nor the resources to finance a lengthy court case, which might not at the end of the day be accepted as a test case.

There is also a difficulty with legal aid. As I understand it, in order to be granted legal aid, claimants have first to be in receipt of an award for chronic bronchitis and emphysema, and therefore in receipt of a weekly pension. Part of that weekly pension must be taken into account for legal aid purposes. So even though they have been made an award, and they are at a time of life when they ought to be using that award to enjoy what little quality of life they have, they are having to use it to finance court cases.

It is likely that the Minister will argue that, in 1974, the mining unions agreed not to widen the scheme. That may be correct, but it was 22 years ago. Surely the men cannot be denied justice on the basis of something that happened to be said in negotiations all those years ago. Neither can the matter be left to common law, as the Prime Minister has suggested. The liability issue has been resolved, and the men have a just case for compensation.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): We are talking about legislation introduced by the First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means many years ago. My hon. Friend referred to the widening of the scheme that was introduced in 1974 by Eric Varley. Towards the end of that Government's period in office, they made an addition to the scheme, so that it was slightly different for slate miners and others in north Wales. I am sure that my hon. Friend would agree that that set a precedent, and it is therefore not much of a hop, step and a jump to argue the case, which he is so capably arguing, that sufferers from chronic bronchitis and emphysema should be included in the general ambit of the scheme.

Mr. Clapham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing that point to my notice. I hope that the Minister will take on board the fact that the scheme has already been amended and widened to take into account the fact that some miners were diagnosed as suffering from asbestosis.

I have said that the DSS assessments of disability should be used to form the basis for compensation awards. I shall briefly explain the calculation used, because I think that it could be used in precisely in the same way for chronic bronchitis and emphysema cases.

The coal industry pneumoconiosis compensation scheme payments are generally made in a lump sum. They are calculated according to a table, relating set amounts to the age of the claimant, the date of development of disease and the degree of disability under the DSS system. The table increases in multiples of 10, from 10 per cent. to 100 per cent. The greater the degree of disability, the larger the amount of money paid. Of course, those amounts taper off the older the claimant is, in accordance with actuarial principles.

I should like to emphasise to the Minister that it is at this point that the DSS scheme becomes part of the basis for compensation under the coal industry pneumoconiosis compensation scheme.

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): My hon. Friend explained the differences, and made comparisons, between those with chronic bronchitis, emphysema and pneumoconiosis. Would he care to comment—I speak from personal experience—on the problems which some former miners have had over the years? Those people have perhaps worked on the coal face all their lives, gone to boards time after time to try to prove that they have pneumoconiosis and have failed dismally. When one of those people dies, it may be accepted, after further arguments, that the person had pneumoconiosis, but it is still not enough, because one must then prove that the person died as a result of pneumoconiosis.

Will my hon. Friend accept that that is a degrading experience for those who have devoted their lives to the coal industry and worked in the dirtiest and most dangerous conditions, who then have to end their lives in that way without the state accepting responsibility or recognising their condition?

Mr. Clapham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those comments. When the miners' parliamentary group made a submission to the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council, we suggested that there should be changes in the way posthumous cases are dealt with. It is harrowing for a family to have to nurse an aged miner, watch him die in a degrading situation, and then to find that, after reviewing the evidence and probably after a number of medical examinations, pneumoconiosis is discovered by a post mortem. I agree that there is a need for a much more sensitive examination system.

I should like to discuss the amounts of compensation available under the pneumoconiosis scheme. The Minister is aware that there have been no increases in payments under the scheme since 1989. When he replies, perhaps he could assure us that the system will be corrected. Perhaps he could tell us whether the scheme will be index-linked—it has not been index-linked in the past—so that the lump sums keep their value.

Another reason why chronic bronchitis and emphysema should come under the pneumoconiosis scheme is that, although they are different diseases, the disabling effects are very similar. It would be relatively easy to combine both diseases within the scope of the pneumoconiosis compensation scheme, which would be ideal for the sufferers of chronic bronchitis and emphysema. It would remove a great deal of worry about having to progress with court cases at a time of life when those chaps ought not to have such a worry.

I still represent miners before the medical appeals tribunals, and my experience suggests that chronic bronchitis and emphysema sufferers need more care, although I should add that that is not universally so. My experience suggests that the sufferers tend invariably to be elderly, and many of them are confined to their homes.

Paying for the widening of the scheme is obviously near and dear to the Minister's heart. The money to pay for the widening of the coal industry pneumoconiosis compensation scheme to cover chronic bronchitis and emphysema is available from the receipts from the sale of British Coal's property. It is selling off more than 130,000 acres of agricultural land, which includes 800 houses and an assortment of other property. I understand that the estimated value is well in excess of £100 million. Perhaps the Minister could tell us whether that is the case.

The total number of claims in the first year was 4,469, and there have been another 440 this year, so there are 4,909 cases. We know that the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council is undertaking a study. Even the most favourable amendments will not double the number of cases, so we are discussing fewer than 10,000 cases.

All the men covered by the current scheme are elderly, and under the current pneumoconiosis compensation scheme, a man of assessed at 40 per cent. would receive £3,015. As the scheme involved a greater number in the first year, there will be fewer cases in future. The cost of paying each case a lump sum of £3,015 is roughly £30 million. Even with favourable amendments, there is enough money in receipts from the sale of property easily to cover bringing chronic bronchitis and emphysema under the scheme.

10.20 pm

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Energy (Mr. Richard Page): I thank the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) for giving the House the opportunity to debate an important issue. I wish that we had a little more than nine minutes in which to give full justice to the issue that the hon. Gentleman has raised. I commend him on the way in which he has set out a particularly complex matter, and his determination in fighting for the interests of people affected by it. As he said, we have spoken and corresponded a number of times. I also appreciate the presence of the hon. Members for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith), who take an interest in the subject.

As you will understand from your personal experience, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the issue is complex, and extremely emotive. That is understandable, and the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent has referred to some of the trauma it can cause. Whatever the difference in view between medical experts on the causation of bronchitis and emphysema, there is no doubt that the effects on those who suffer from those diseases—particularly emphysema—can be harrowing and distressing for them and their families.

When the pneumoconiosis compensation scheme was established, it was intended to compensate those who suffer from a condition that can be contracted only through coal mining, although, as has been pointed out to the House, some closely related conditions have been added since.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the fact that some of the mining unions signed an undertaking that they would not press for further compensation schemes for industrial diseases other than pneumoconiosis. However, I recognise that life moves on, and I do not see why that should be an all-restricting bar.

I am fully aware that the hon. Gentleman is very keen for the scheme established by British Coal to be extended to encompass chronic bronchitis and emphysema. It may be helpful if I explain some of the corporation's position.

In the early 1970s, the National Coal Board, as it then was, introduced the scheme to provide compensation without proof of fault, because the causal link between

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contracting pneumoconiosis and working in the coal mining industry was clear. However, it is well known that smoking is a major cause of bronchitis and emphysema, so it could not be appropriate for British Coal to compensate individuals on a no-fault basis, when, if they smoked, they contributed to their own subsequent misfortune. That does not prevent any cases being brought against British Coal.

The hon. Member has drawn attention to the possibility of the Department of Social Security paying benefits in certain circumstances. Before elaborating on that, it might be useful if I briefly explained the background to the prescription of chronic bronchitis and emphysema for DSS benefit purposes, with the caveat that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security may obviously want to comment in more detail on matters relating to these issues.

The Secretary of State for Social Security is advised on the prescription of diseases for social security benefit purposes by the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council. As the House knows, that is an independent, expert body, on which the Trades Union Congress and the Confederation of British Industry are equally represented.

Having considered the issues several times for nearly 20 years, the council was eventually persuaded in August 1992 to recommend to the Secretary of State that chronic bronchitis and emphysema should be prescribed as industrial diseases for underground coal miners. The DSS accepted the council's recommendation in full, and those diseases were prescribed in September 1993.

Workers in many industries, including coal miners, suffer from chronic bronchitis and emphysema. The latter can develop as part of the natural aging of the lung, and severe damage can be caused by smoking. In fact, I am given to understand that more than 90 per cent. of the overall United Kingdom deaths due to chronic obstructive pulmonary disease—a generic term embracing emphysema—are considered to be due to smoking.

While miners were obviously not allowed to smoke underground, I understand that their consumption of tobacco was close to the national average. The House will appreciate that it would involve fairly heavy smoking sessions afterwards if one had to catch up to somewhere near the national average.

For the purposes of claiming industrial injuries disablement benefit for chronic bronchitis and emphysema, a claimant needs to have a chest radiograph showing at least category one in the International Labour Organisation's "Classification of Radiographs of Pneumoconiosis". I should emphasise, however, that the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council recommended that criterion as an indication of exposure to coal dust, rather than a clear causal link between the two diseases.

I know that the hon. Member—and others—regard the qualifying criteria for DSS benefit as too stringent. I also know that the House will appreciate that I cannot comment in great detail on what is a matter for the Secretary of State for Social Security, but it is worthy of note that the success rate among claimants to date of 11.2 per cent. is broadly in line with the success rate for prescribed diseases in general, which is about 11 per cent.

As the hon. Member stated, the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council is conducting a review into the qualifying conditions, and I believe that he has given advice and some evidence to the review on that matter. The council hopes to submit a report to DSS Ministers on the review early this year, and the Government have made it clear that they will carefully consider any recommendations that the council may make.

One of the arguments advanced to support the proposition that British Coal should recognise a causal link between coal dust and bronchitis and emphysema is that the qualifying criteria under the DSS scheme include evidence of category one pneumoconiosis. It is worth emphasising that that criterion merely shows that the individual concerned was exposed to coal dust: it does not show that a particular level or degree of exposure relates directly to the specific incapacity experienced by the individual.

Category one, although widely recognised as an indication of the condition, is not in itself a level that causes disablement. That is one reason why British Coal's scheme requires successful claimants to have at least category two pneumoconiosis. Thus, individuals who are certified as suffering from chronic bronchitis and emphysema for DSS purposes are not necessarily eligible for benefits under the British Coal scheme.

If they have pneumoconiosis at a lower level—that is, category one—they may be entitled to DSS benefit. If they have a higher level of pneumoconiosis—that is, category two—they may be entitled to compensation from British Coal. Conceivably, if they have a category two level, accompanied by bronchitis and emphysema, they may qualify for compensation from both sources. The hon. Gentleman produced an example to illustrate that point. As we have already noted, IIAC is looking into the matter again, to find out whether any changes to the DSS scheme to provide for additional compensation seem appropriate.

I said at the start that I wished that I had more time to give a full response to the hon. Gentleman. In the very short time that I have taken—at the gallop—I have not been in a position to set out the situation as fully as I should have liked. I understand the strength of feeling on the subject.

The hon. Gentleman and I know that it is a complex matter. He has presented to the House a way in which the existing scheme might be amended, and has given much time and thought to that matter. He would be upset if I gave an off-the-cuff response, and I will come back to him—

The motion having been made at Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 19 January 1996

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

Standing Charges

9.34 am

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): With the leave of the House, I should like to present a petition on behalf of the senior citizens of the Darlington Lane branch of the National Federation of Retirement Pensions Associations and others in the parliamentary constituency of Stockton, North. It is on an issue of long standing—standing charges on utility services.

The petition is presented at a time when that issue is revealed in stark contrast—more so than previously—in that vast profits are being made since the privatisation of those utilities and obscene salaries are being paid to people who do no more than occupy seats on the board of management.

The Petition . . . sheweth that those sections of the community who are in receipt of State Retirement Pension and State Benefits are suffering great hardship on account of the increase in the cost of living, the imposition of V.A.T. and the decreasing purchasing power of the said Pension.

Standing Charges on bills for the essential supply of gas, electricity, water and telephone are unwarranted and bear most heavily on low income households.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House should pass legislation forthwith for the relief of Old Age Pensioners and others in receipt of low incomes by requiring the Companies supplying households with gas, electricity, water and telephones to abolish Standing Charges.

And Your Petitioners, as in duty bound shall ever pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Orders of the Day

British Time (Extra Daylight) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.36 am

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I have great pleasure in introducing this Bill. [AN HON. MEMBER: "Too early."] It has support on both sides of the House, and in all parts of the United Kingdom.

I shall first describe the advantages that I envisage that the Bill will bring to the nation. In relation to road safety, the Bill will undoubtedly save a very large number of lives. That fact is asserted by the Transport Research Laboratory of the Department of Transport, which has estimated that there would be about 2,080 fewer accidents per year, and approximately 110 fewer deaths per year.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Butterfill: I wish to make more progress, if my hon. Friend would allow me, but I am sure that in due course I shall happily give way to him.

Perhaps I can anticipate what my hon. Friend might have wanted to mention—a report from the Scottish Office, which says that, following an analysis that it has done in Scotland, there would be only a marginal benefit in reductions in serious injuries, and a report from De Montfort university, which also questions the figures of the Transport Research Laboratory.

Those two reports have only recently been prepared, and we have not had time to analyse them in detail, but the preliminary analysis that has been carried out by the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety and by the Policy Studies Institute suggests that the methodology of both reports is deeply flawed.

The Transport Research Laboratory has the largest collection of scientists and statisticians who are permanently employed in analysing the causes of accidents and their nature and commenting to the House and to Ministers on the way in which those accidents arise, and ways in which they might be prevented. I do not believe that any group of scientists and statisticians is better qualified to consider the matter. With great respect to the civil servants in the Scottish Office—who I am sure are people of enormous integrity and good will—I do not believe that their expertise can compare with that of the Transport Research Laboratory.

With even greater respect to the academics at De Montfort university, it must be said that they are not renowned as experts in traffic safety measures. The university's report, which not only refers to road accidents but also questions the alleged reductions in crime and the benefits to business, gives greater cause for scepticism than some other reports.

I find it difficult to understand how the university can know more about crime than the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Police Federation or the Home Office. I also do not believe that the university knows more about business than the Confederation of British Industry and all the other business organisations which support the Bill.

Mr. Gallie: My hon. Friend wrote in *The House Magazine* that all the chambers of commerce in Scotland

[Mr. Gallie]

fully supported his Bill. That is absolutely wrong. His remarks are without foundation, as checks with the chambers of commerce confirm. Why should we accept any of my hon. Friend's comments about the validity of the reports to which he has referred?

Mr. Butterfill: I wish that I could express my gratitude to my hon. Friend for that intervention, but I cannot. The last time that the Scottish chambers of commerce voted on the issue in autumn 1994, they supported the principle of daylight saving. There has been no subsequent vote in the Scottish chambers, although some individual chambers of commerce have voted on the matter.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ayr is absolutely correct to say that some individual chambers of commerce in Scotland—notably Inverness and Aberdeen—oppose the measure. However, not all Scottish chambers of commerce share that view. I have received a letter from the Edinburgh chamber of commerce which refers specifically to its support for the notion. I shall deal with business matters later in the debate, as I am sure that there will be other opportunities to deal with that issue.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Butterfill: If hon. Members will allow me to make a little progress, I shall give way some time in the future.

I know that there is concern in Scotland about the measure and I sympathise very much with Scottish anxiety about the road safety issue. I know that the mornings in Scotland are darker for much longer than in England, and that my Bill will make those morning hours darker and longer still. However, I remind the people of Scotland that the advantages already enjoyed by the rest of the United Kingdom are even more important to Scotland.

The analysis by the Transport Research Laboratory shows that, during the experimental period from 1967 to 1971, in southern England the number of accidents decreased by 2.2 per cent., while in Scotland the figure was 5.3 per cent.

Hon. Members must realise that there is a correlation between accidents and darkness and bad weather. Sadly, Scotland suffers worse weather than the rest of the United Kingdom and it has more hours of darkness. Therefore, it is logical that darkness should impact on the accident figures in the way that the Transport Research Laboratory has shown. For those reasons, I believe that the case for fewer accidents is proven.

Miss Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that all the evidence shows that more children are killed in summer than in winter?

Mr. Butterfill: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. It is true that there are more accidents during the long summer holidays when children play out of doors unsupervised. For the rest of the year they are in school, where they are not exposed to the dangers associated with playing outdoors; therefore, there are fewer accidents. If the hon. Lady examines the accident statistics, she will see the clear correlation between school terms and fewer accidents. However, that does not disprove my case in any way—in fact, it confirms it.

Sir David Mitchell (North-West Hampshire): Before my hon. Friend leaves the accidents issue, will he deal with the question of postal and construction workers and others who work outdoors? They travel to work and work in the dark, thereby increasing the risk of accident.

Mr. Butterfill: I shall deal with the issues separately. I have a letter written by Alan Tuffin when the matter was debated in 1987, in which he says that there is no hard evidence to suggest that there would be any increase in accidents or energy use among post office workers. I shall happily pass a copy of that letter to my hon. Friend.

Dr. Godman: On a procedural matter, if the hon. Gentleman's legislation is successful today—I sincerely hope that it is not—will he agree to send his Bill to a Special Standing Committee to consider the matters to which he refers? At the very least, the Scots would welcome that suggestion.

Mr. Butterfill: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but I do not think that that would be the appropriate procedure. The Bill will go to a Standing Committee, where we shall be able to examine all the arguments in great detail. The House will have many opportunities to debate the issue.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): We all know that this is a controversial matter. Therefore, I took the precaution of writing to a wide range of statutory and voluntary bodies, businesses and schools in my constituency. The response was four to one in favour of the proposed change. However, the majority in favour was less clear—at two to one—among head teachers, who had some very serious reservations about child safety.

Will the hon. Gentleman consider an amendment in Committee which would introduce the measures in his Bill for a trial period of about a year, with the provision to extend through statutory instrument if that was the consensus?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. That was a very long intervention. Many right hon. and hon. Members are hoping to catch my eye in the debate, but some will not be successful if interventions of that length continue.

Mr. Butterfill: I am most grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am interested to hear the hon. Gentleman's comments about his mailbag. His findings are approximately the same as my own—although mine were slightly higher, at closer to five to one in favour.

As to his substantive point, I am not in favour of an experimental period. However, if it was the will of the Committee that there should be an experimental period, I would consider that suggestion sympathetically. I believe that the previous experimental period was too short, and we did not receive enough hard evidence to make an informed decision. I believe that any future experimental period should be of five years' duration, during which time we could gather hard evidence on which to base a review, if the House believed that such a review were necessary.

Only 18 per cent. of all accidents involving schoolchildren occur on the journey to or from school. Some 82 per cent. of accidents occur after school, predominantly in the early afternoon or evening, when children are at play outdoors. That is when our children are most vulnerable, and they will benefit most if we move an hour of daylight from the morning to the

afternoon. I believe that that will lead also to a reduction in accidents—not only those involving children but those involving the elderly and people returning from work. For those reasons, I believe that the accident prevention case is proven absolutely.

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Butterfill: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I must make some progress.

That is not simply my opinion. The measure is also supported by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents in England and in Scotland, the Automobile Association, the RAC, the Police Federation and the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland.

It is also supported by the Child Accident Prevention Trust, the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety and the Road Safety Council of Northern Ireland. As that is a list of people who have no axe to grind and are concerned solely with our health and safety on the roads, the case for road safety is overwhelming and irrefutable.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Butterfill: No. I must make some progress. I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman later.

I now turn to the reduction in crime. There is no doubt that a high proportion of crimes, particularly those against the person, such as mugging and assault, as well as vehicle theft and theft from vehicles, occur in the hours of darkness. Criminals do not get up early to commit crimes. They are probably still in bed sleeping off a hangover produced by the proceeds of their previous crimes.

There is no doubt that crime is influenced by the time of day. Home Office statistics show that, if present patterns of offending persist, the measure will result in an overall reduction of about 200,000 crimes a year. The Association of Chief Police Officers, the Police Federation, the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, the Association of Chief Police Officers (Scotland) and Age Concern all believe that we should proceed with the measure as it would result in a significant reduction in crime.

Age Concern strongly supports the measure, as many elderly people are frightened to go out after dark. They feel trapped in their homes. Many elderly people will not attend social events in the afternoon, and they deserve a great deal of sympathy. Their lives are difficult enough, particularly north of the border, where the hours of daylight are so short. In the very north of Scotland, it starts getting dark at about 2.45 pm. The measure will be of enormous benefit to elderly people, particularly those in Scotland.

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): Will the hon. Gentleman explain the point he has just made? If his contention is that the measure will reduce crime, why do two thirds of police officers work day and early evening shifts?

Mr. Butterfill: They work those shifts to prevent crime. The police believe that the measure will prevent crime, and they are the experts. I have consulted my local chief constable in Dorset, who is quite convinced that it will reduce crime, as are all chief police officers, including those in Scotland. All members of the Police Federation are unanimous in that view, which is supported by Home Office statistics.

Let me turn to business. I have already mentioned Scottish chambers of commerce, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) will accept what I said about their view. The last time they voted on the measure, they were convinced that it would assist them, although one or two now take a different view, and the new director general is personally not as keen on the measure as his predecessor was.

The Association of British Chambers of Commerce supports the measure. The Confederation of British Industry recently carried out a complete survey of its members, and CBI Scotland was the only branch that was not in favour of the measure. On average, it received the support of 75 per cent. of CBI members in the United Kingdom. It received 84 per cent. support in the south of England, 75 per cent. in the midlands, 70 per cent. in northern England, and 70 per cent. in Northern Ireland. An overwhelming majority of businesses believe that the measure would be good for them, as does the British Tourist Authority.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): My hon. Friend is telling the House who supports the Bill and who does not. When he was first interviewed about it on radio, he suggested that there should be a separate time zone for Scotland. That is a silly idea, which would greatly disadvantage Scotland. Does he still maintain that view, and if he has moved away from it, why?

Mr. Butterfill: My hon. Friend is quite wrong. I never suggested that. A reporter asked what would be my reaction if Members of Parliament representing Scotland wished to have a separate time zone. I said that, if that was the wish of the majority of the Scottish Members, it would not be for me as an English Member to seek to impose my view on them.

Although I have not heard anyone articulate that view—perhaps the Scottish National party will do so—it would be a silly idea for Scotland to have a separate time zone. Even on a longitudinal basis, there is insufficient justification, and we should not give it further thought. It was not my suggestion, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to put that on record.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Has the hon. Gentleman considered the implication of such a change on Ireland? The west of Ireland is in the next time zone. Is he not imposing a solution that either forces the Republic to move into a time zone that is miles outside its range, or divides Ireland, not just on religion and politics but on time as well?

Mr. Butterfill: I understand that the Republic of Ireland would like to change time zones, but only if we do so. The Bill would give it that opportunity. We are primarily concerned with the United Kingdom. We do not legislate for the Republic of Ireland, and I do not think that we ever shall, so the hon. Gentleman's suggestion is something of a red herring.

The Bill would provide immense benefits to business. Some 60 per cent. of our exports go to the European Community.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): That is not correct.

Mr. Butterfill: My hon. Friend says that it is not correct. He will have the opportunity to make his own speech.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Butterfill: No. My hon. Friend can make his own speech in a moment.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Will my hon. Friend give way on an important point?

Mr. Butterfill: No.

Mr. Duncan Smith *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Interventions of this nature are not helpful. It is obvious that the hon. Gentleman is not giving way. That being the case, the hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) should resume his seat.

Mr. Butterfill: I do not wish to engage in banter about statistics with my hon. Friend, whose antipathy to the European Community is well known.

At present, there are four hours in the day when we encounter difficulties in trading with our partners in the European Community. They start a hour before we do, they go to lunch a hour before we do, we then go to lunch, and they pack up a hour before we do. British business is disadvantaged for four hours a day. In addition, we have many opportunities to trade with the far east, which is a growing area of trade. The Bill would allow us the opportunity of one hour's trading with the Tokyo market. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There is a great deal of chatting going on, and I am having difficulty hearing the hon. Gentleman. He should be given a fair hearing, and that is not happening.

Mr. Butterfill: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

There will be special advantages for the banking and financial services sectors, which is particularly important in Scotland. Edinburgh is the fourth largest banking and financial services centre in the European Union, after London, Frankfurt and Paris, so it has a special reason for wanting to trade at the same time as the others.

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Butterfill: I must make a little progress. I have been very generous in giving way. My hon. Friend can make his own speech later.

British business has in large measure confirmed the importance that it attaches to my Bill and the boost that it would give our national economy.

The quality of life in our country is greatly inhibited by the present arrangements. If they are changed, all our citizens would have much more opportunity to make use of the available daylight. Daylight is currently restricted, particularly in winter. Many people go to work in the morning in the dark and return home in the dark, and never have the opportunity to enjoy outside recreation for a considerable part of the year. That affects the nation's health and the ability of schoolchildren to play sports in the afternoon.

Many organisations support a change because it would provide greater opportunities for recreation, gardening and sport. The British Medical Association says that the change would make for a healthier nation. There would be less sickness, and seasonal affective disorders would be reduced. My Bill has the support of the Sports Council, BMA, Royal Horticultural Society, Scottish Sports Council and National Playing Fields Association in England and Scotland. If the change is made, all our citizens will lead a more enjoyable life through having an extra hour of daylight in the afternoon.

At present, tourism suffers from the fact that, for a large part of the year, the daylight available is not particularly usable. We all have experience of waking up and finding that it is already light outside—but at the time that we might be able to go out and enjoy ourselves, it is already getting dark. In September, it is often dark at 7 o'clock, when some people might wish to go out and enjoy themselves.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): People can have fun in the dark.

Mr. Butterfill: My hon. Friend is quite right—people do enjoy themselves in the dark. They can do other things in the dark, and I shall not prevent them, but they also like to do a lot of things in daylight.

Most tourist attractions in Scotland are daylight-dependent, so Scotland would particularly benefit. If the change is made, the shoulder months of the year would be extended.

Mr. Welsh: Will the hon. Gentleman give way now?

Mr. Butterfill: I made it clear to the hon. Gentleman that I will not give way. Perhaps he will please allow me to continue my speech.

Tourism organisations argue that, in spring and autumn, when activities are usually curtailed, there would be a huge extension of the tourism season. The British Tourist Authority supports my measure. Studies show that the increased spend on tourism and leisure would be £1.2 billion a year. The proposed change also has the support of the English, Northern Ireland and Wales tourist boards. A huge number of companies involved in tourism throughout the country have written urging me to present my Bill and get it through the House.

Most passion surrounding the proposed change has been aroused in Scotland, but I do not accept the assertion by some Scottish Members that change is overwhelmingly opposed there. A number of opinion polls have shown that the reverse is true. The 1992 Gallup poll showed that public opinion was evenly divided, with 42 per cent. of people in Scotland in favour of change and 42 per cent. against, with the remainder being "don't knows".

When people were told the accident figures, support for the change in Scotland increased to 69 per cent. An NOP poll in 1994 showed that 62 per cent. of Scots were in favour of the Bill. The most recent poll was organised by the newspaper *Scotland on Sunday*, and it showed that 55 per cent. of Scots were against change.

The polls have presented mixed information. At the very least, opinion in Scotland is evenly divided, but the evidence from the majority of polls is that it is in favour of the measure. Opposition Members who claim the reverse do not understand true opinion in Scotland.

Many Scottish farmers have written to me expressing their support for my Bill, contrary to the assertions of its opponents. Scottish farmers are in large measure in favour of change.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): On the occasion of the previous experiment in this time nonsense, I was living in Aberdeen. Whatever the public might say in answer to hypothetical questions on opinion polls, when daylight hours were changed in the 1960s, that was most unpopular in Scotland, particularly in the north. My hon. Friend should not pay attention to opinion polls, but should talk to real Scots in Scotland, who would give him a different answer.

Mr. Butterfill: I have done precisely that. I spent the new year in Scotland, listening to the opinions of Scottish people.

Mr. Bill Walker: I am surprised that my hon. Friend found them able to articulate their views.

Mr. Butterfill: Some of the Scots with whom I spent a most enjoyable time were quite merry, but my stay was an enjoyable experience.

A dairy farmer in Kirkwall in Orkney wrote to *The Scotsman*:

"Dark in the morning is fine in the winter. We work by electricity anyway. What would bother me is if it would mean the clocks didn't go forward in summer. I need the sun to drive the dew off the grass for harvesting. The men would be kicking their heels for an extra hour if they didn't go forward."

A farmer in east Lothian commented:

"In my younger days I worked on a farm in Aberdeenshire. In those days we fed the cattle in the dark in the winter mornings and it was dark when we fed them in the afternoons, and we had to work under the poor light of paraffin lanterns, not the electric light most farms have today . . . The farmers I have spoken to around here don't seem to have any strong views one way or the other".

The debate in Scotland has generated a lot of heat, but not a lot of light in respect of Scottish opinion. I am convinced that opinion polls provide a better indication of Scottish opinion than the views of some hon. Members who purport to speak for Scotland in the House.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): For the sake of balance, given the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), I too was working in Scotland at the time of the last experiment, as a teacher. It made not a ha'p'orth of difference whether there were six hours of daylight from 9 o'clock to 3 o'clock or from 10 o'clock to 4 o'clock except in respect of the safety aspect, which was eloquently argued by my hon. Friend, and the advantage of being able to teach sport in the afternoon.

Mr. Butterfill: I thank my hon. Friend. I now wish to refer to some of the arguments made against the Bill by particular groups of workers. I very much understand that there are people who have to work outside and who have to get up early in the morning, for whom the Bill may present particular disadvantages. I am not without sympathy for their predicament, but I think that it has often been considerably exaggerated.

I shall deal first with post office workers. I am well aware that the Communications Workers Union has been lobbying hard against the Bill, and, in fact, has retained consultants to advise on how to conduct a campaign against it. I am also aware that certain Members of this House are sponsored by that union, and have a particular interest in the issue. Alan Tuffin, to whom I have referred, has said that there is no hard evidence of accidents to post office workers as a result of the previous experiment.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath) *rose—*

Mr. Butterfill: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, who has a particular interest in the matter, as an hon Member sponsored by the Communications Workers Union.

Mr. Hain: Does the hon. Gentleman not recall that the Conservative Government's White Paper of 1970 confirmed that the number of accidents involving postmen and women doubled during the experimental period?

Mr. Butterfill: That was not confirmed by the letter that I received from the union, nor was it confirmed by the letter that Mr. West of the Post Office sent me when the matter was debated in 1987. Mr. West said:

"Finally, although we have no evidence to support the contention, it has to be said that carrying out deliveries almost exclusively in darkness could make our delivery staff more vulnerable to criminal attack."

The House should note that he said that there was no evidence. Mr. West continued:

"I understand that current statistics do not in fact show any particular correlation between attacks and dark winter mornings."

Sir Peter Lloyd (Fareham): While the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) was right to say that the number of accidents went up during the experimental period, I believe that the number went up throughout the year. The point was that there was no correlation between the increase in the number of accidents and whether the morning was dark or light.

Mr. Butterfill: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that helpful intervention.

John Holt, a postman from Portree on the Isle of Skye, wrote to *The Scotsman* on the issue, saying:

"It really doesn't matter whether the clock changes or not. It wouldn't make my work any harder. I am aware when I'm driving my van to watch out for children going to school. But I would just as soon have an extra hour in the evening. I hate it when it gets dark at four."

That comes from a postman from one of the most northerly parts of Scotland, and I therefore believe that the case with regard to postmen has been considerably exaggerated.

I now wish to refer to farmers. It has been suggested that farmers are unanimously against the Bill and—I must say—that certainly was the case some years ago. Farmers were very solidly against the Bill then, but that is not the case today. There have been enormous changes in farming and in farming methods, and the industry is quite different from what it was when last we debated this issue in the House.

The National Farmers Union has been traditionally hostile to the measure but is now entirely neutral, and, in a letter to me, it confirmed that many NFU members see considerable advantages in the Bill. It is interesting to note why that may be the case.

[Mr. Butterfill]

For example, Scottish dairy farmers are considered to have the greatest problem with the Bill's provisions. Dairy farmers keep their cattle in nearly all winter, and only let them out after milking in the morning—which will be done in the dark whether the Bill goes through or not. The farmers let them out into the fields later if the weather is clement, to allow them to enjoy what little daylight is available. The cattle are brought in again in the afternoon.

If the Bill goes through, farmers will be able to leave the cattle out for longer and bring them in at night, so there are advantages for dairy farmers in the measure. Similarly, Mr. Ross—the president of the Scottish NFU—confirmed in a radio debate with me only last week that the Bill would not create problems for dairy farmers in Scotland.

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): The excellent briefing provided by the Library says that, if the Bill becomes law, it will not be sunrise in Newcastle—near my constituency—on 21 December until 9.29 in the morning, while sunset will be at half-past 4 or 20 minutes to 5 in the afternoon. Where is the hon. Gentleman getting these extra two hours from? It seems to me that the sun will rise when it always rises, and set when it always sets.

Mr. Butterfill: The hon. Gentleman would do himself a service by reading the rest of the briefing, as he would then understand how the measure works. We want to move an hour of daylight from the morning to the afternoon. My point is that, while dairy farmers will still be milking indoors and in the dark, they will have an hour of extra daylight in the afternoon, to the benefit of their stock and their lives.

I shall move from dairy to arable farmers, from whom I have received letters supporting the Bill. The extra hour would mean that arable farmers would be able to do their spinning and top dressing in the spring at a time when they cannot do it at the moment. In the autumn, farmers will be able to harvest their crops in the late afternoon and early evening—

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): They do that anyway.

Mr. Butterfill: The hon. Gentleman says that they do it anyway, but the point is that, if the Bill goes through, they will be able to do it in daylight. We are all familiar with arable farmers harvesting in the dark with large combines with lights. To the extent that there will be more light, the Bill will have advantages for arable farms.

The only group of farmers that the president of the Scottish NFU stated would be disadvantaged by the Bill are those who have their stock out on the hillsides—sheep farmers and beef farmers. They keep their stock outdoors, and the difficulty for them will be that they will not be able to get out to see their stock until one hour later than at the moment. That, it is alleged, will totally disrupt their lives.

I frankly find that difficult to believe, because there are an awful lot of things that a farmer can do in the morning. The cattle and sheep do not know what the time is—they operate on nature's clock, and they are not aware whether it is Greenwich mean time, British summer time or double summer time. The animals need to be dealt with when their natural body clocks say so.

Mr. Gallie: One reason why it is important for farmers to see their stock before 11 o'clock in the morning is that they depend on vets, and 11am will be already halfway through the vet's day. If everyone comes in with messages for the vet at that time, it will create great pressure, and animal welfare—a very important issue these days—could suffer.

Mr. Butterfill: I sympathise with the position of the veterinary profession. My hon. Friend may know that I am on the council of the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals, the largest employer of vets in the country apart from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. If the Bill goes through, vets will be able to come out and look at animals later in the afternoon—they will simply transpose one hour of their working day to the afternoon. It will not make it impossible for the work to be done.

For a farmer to say that he cannot accommodate an extra hour of darkness in the morning is puzzling, as there is an awful lot for farmers to do. The farmers I know are constantly complaining that they must fill in forms for the European Community and others. They complain about their VAT returns, and that they have a struggle to do the school run in the morning and get back to their livestock. They will have much more time if the Bill goes through to do all of those things. I believe that many of the assertions made by Opposition Members about the predicament of farmers are totally ill-founded.

I regret that the leader of the Scottish National party, the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), is not in his place. He tells me that it will be impossible for his farmers if the Bill is enacted. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is not present. In his own constituency, however, the Buchan branch of the Scottish NFU took a vote on the issue this week. The result was that eight to one of the hon. Gentleman's own branch of farmers voted in favour of the Bill. It appears that SNP Members do not know what farmers think in their constituencies.

Mr. Welsh: I know full well what happened in Buchan, but that is one NFU branch among many in the area. Producing one NFU branch, one postman and one farmer hardly shows a mass movement towards the hon. Gentleman's point of view. He asked for Scottish opinion, but he has been loth to hear mine.

The proof of the pudding is the last time that the experiment took place in Scotland. It was a disaster, and Parliament rejected it. Portugal listened to the blandishments that the hon. Gentleman is now presenting in 1972 and went to central European time. It is now regretting doing so, for reasons that have been expressed this morning, and wishes to return to Greenwich mean time. The hon. Gentleman's experiment failed in the past. The Scottish people know that, and reject what he is putting forward.

Mr. Butterfill: I listened to the hon. Gentleman's speech with considerable interest. What he says is not borne out by the correspondence that I have had. Nor do I believe that the position that the Scottish NFU has taken, uniquely—it is not the position taken by the NFU elsewhere in the kingdom—is entirely representative. Some of its branches have had the nous to take a poll on

the issue, and that I find absolutely conclusive. I have received many letters—I shall not bore the House—and I could read out any number from Scottish farmers on this issue to convince the hon. Gentleman that there is considerable support.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Will the hon. Gentleman make it clear—I think that I have understood him well—that he is suggesting that farmers should rejig the whole of their working day, and that business men and financiers are incapable of doing so? I am not clear about the logic of that.

Mr. Butterfill: The hon. Lady may wish to know that many farmers believe that what is proposed will give them an advantage. That was the point that I was trying to make to them. Many farmers have written to say that they agree. The NFU has confirmed to me in writing that a large proportion of its members are in favour. I am not seeking to impose something on an unwilling group of farmers. Farmers have changed their view. They have come round to the majority view of other industries.

It is alleged that builders and others who work outdoors are vulnerable on safety issues. I am a chartered surveyor by profession. I have spent—

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There is certain activity in the Chamber, if it can be so described. The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) is clearly operating in a different time zone, and is sleeping. Should we not proceed to the next business?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for me. All sorts of things have been going on this morning. Chatting has been taking place, and jokes have been made.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): At least I have been quiet.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have already said that the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) should be given a fair hearing. He has a right to put his case. Some hon. Members may not agree with him, but he still has a right to put his case. I hope that he will now be given a reasonable hearing. The chit-chat and joking must cease.

Mr. Butterfill: I am grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall try to make some progress. I have given way on many occasions. I am conscious that many hon. Members want to speak.

As I have said, I am a chartered surveyor. I have been a director of a number of building companies, including companies that operate in Scotland and Scandinavia. I am very familiar with the activities of the building industry.

We operate in a relatively mild climate. Compared with the climate in which the building industry operates in other parts of Europe, including Scandinavia, and in north America, our builders are blessed with—

Mr. Bill Walker: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Butterfill: No. I must make progress. I have had too many interruptions already.

We are blessed with the Gulf stream, which warms our shores. Although, from time to time, we have brief periods of extreme weather, by and large we have much milder weather than many of our continental neighbours. They all work satisfactorily in climatic conditions that are far worse than our own.

It is not true to say that builders are opposed to the measure. Many builders have written to me. I have received letters from Tarmac, Laing and Bovis, for example, all telling me that the measure will assist their activities. When the Federation of Master Builders last voted on the issue, the result was 45 to 35 in favour.

I have had interesting letters from contractors in Scotland. For example, the Seamless Roofing Company in Scotland wrote:

"The general pattern for most building works is of a relatively slow start in the morning with men and materials being organised. Only then does the actual construction phase start. When daylight hours are short it is infinitely preferable to allocate them to this latter period. We find in our own company that we waste daylight in the morning and desperately need it in the afternoon. Do not accept the argument that sites close between 3.00 and 4.00 pm. With the universal prevalence of 714s"—

that is, self-employed status—

"5.00 to 6.00 is now the norm."

That is a Scottish builder. I could quote many others.

It is alleged that other groups of workers would be put at risk. The British Safety Council, which is Britain's largest industrial safety organisation, wrote to me on 17 January, wholeheartedly supporting the Bill. That is the organisation that is principally concerned with safety at work.

I do not underestimate the argument that certain groups in the population will be inconvenienced, but I believe that that inconvenience has been grotesquely exaggerated by many of the Bill's opponents. It is clear that the Bill has widespread support throughout the United Kingdom. There is overwhelming support among the population. Polls show over 70 per cent. in favour.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Butterfill: I know that my opponents are well-meaning. In my opinion, however, they are living in a time warp of about 150 years ago. The country wants the Bill. Parliament should be allowed to vote freely on it.

Mr. Couchman: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. David Marshall (Glasgow, Shettleston): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Butterfill: No. I am sorry. I am into my peroration, and I am not giving way.

Mr. Couchman *rose*—

Mr. David Marshall *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member made it clear that he is not giving way.

Mr. Butterfill: I shall give way for the last time to my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman).

Mr. Couchman: My hon. Friend has been generous throughout the morning. Before he finishes, will he say whether he has a frisson of guilt about attacking the world standard of time, Greenwich mean time, with his Bill?

Mr. Butterfill: I was sure that that issue would be raised, if not now at a later stage. I shall deal with it now. Of course

[Mr. Butterfill]

I am not attacking Greenwich mean time. Greenwich mean time will remain for navigation purposes. It will be used throughout the world. Its importance will be entirely undiminished by the Bill.

I hope that Parliament will feel able to debate the Bill freely, and particularly to vote on it freely. I hope that those who oppose the Bill will have the courage to allow it to go to a free vote and will not attempt to talk it out, which I regard as an entirely undemocratic process. I accept that I have spoken for some time, but I have been most generous in giving way to all those who sought to intervene.

There is an old saying about how we measure the way that the clocks change: fall back, spring forward. I urge the House to agree that we should leap forward in 1997 and pass the Bill.

10.29 am

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): The hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) sounded a bit like a snake oil salesman at one stage in his speech. He said that the Bill would create extra daylight, that there would be rejoicing in the streets, and that it would even make Scottish farmers happy. I have news for him, not only as a Scottish farmer, but as a parent of children who have to join a school bus about as far south in Scotland as one can possibly get at 10 past eight in the morning. I do not want them to have to get on a bus in darkness. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the Bill will not cause rejoicing.

The hon. Gentleman quoted some curious data from an opinion poll and said that there was massive support for the proposition in Scotland. If he were to put it to the people of Scotland, or anywhere else in the world, that extra daylight was on offer—rather like longer holidays or longer summers—I suppose that they would say they that wanted it, but it simply cannot be done.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Does my hon. Friend accept that the consumer survey was carried out by a very respectable organisation, National Opinion Poll? I am sure that it framed its questions in such a way as not to cause the bias that my hon. Friend suggests.

Mr. Home Robertson: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right, but we are all politicians and we know that it is possible prove almost anything from different sources of data, whether polls or academic research.

As a farmer, I should like to dispose of the argument that the principal opposition to the proposed legislation comes from the agricultural lobby; it does not. The hon. Gentleman went on at great length about Scottish cows. I put it to him, with great respect, that Scottish cows could not give a damn what the clock says. Dairymen going about their work are not necessarily affected, but their families are. If the dairyman is expected to get up to milk his cows in the morning darkness, his wife will have to get going at the same time, perhaps to go to work. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] Because if we change the clocks, other employers will be affected as well, and children will have to join buses to go to school in the dark, so it is not quite as simple as the hon. Gentleman suggests.

When I was elected to Parliament an awful long time ago, I was aware that I had the honour of becoming a member of an extremely important, august and powerful body and that we could amend all sorts of laws, but it never entered my head that anybody would be dotty enough to try to alter the laws of physics and the solar system. That seems to be what we face today. I suppose that there is a precedent, not from an English king, but from a Danish king of England—King Canute, who tried to hold back the tide and got his feet wet. We are in the same science fiction territory with the Bill.

Mr. Foulkes: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Home Robertson: I know that my hon. Friend is always up with the lark and knows what the sunrise looks like, so let us hear from him now.

Mr. Foulkes: And I am bright and awake, unlike the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes), who has left.

Will my hon. Friend condemn the opponents of the Bill who talk about daylight robbery and accuse the supporters of the Bill of being time bandits? No one is taking away any daylight, just as no one is creating extra daylight. We are talking about better use of existing daylight, whether in the north, south, east or west.

Mr. Home Robertson: My hon. Friend is a dear friend and I know how interested he is early morning activities, but he has rashly drawn my attention to the title of the Bill—British Time (Extra Daylight) Bill. Both wrong. It is neither British time, nor will it create extra daylight.

The hon. Member for Bournemouth, West suggested that his Bill would save lives, create jobs and even cause rejoicing among Scottish farmers. All those propositions are based on delusions and on dodgy data. The safety statistics in particular are baloney, as they do not take account of the fact that drink-driving enforcement legislation was enacted during the previous experiment to change the time.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): The proper way to sort out the science, to which the hon. Gentleman properly paid some regard a minute or two ago, is not by arguing something that has already been dealt with by the research briefs from the Library, from the Transport Research Laboratory and from all recognised resources.

Will the hon. Gentleman accept that, if the five hours of the debate were the equivalent of five winter months, the benefits—the reduction in the number of casualties—would be apparent during the six minutes for which the hon. Gentleman has been speaking, as two extra people would not have died? For every three minutes of the debate, one person's life could be saved if we moved forward and adopted this sensible proposal.

Mr. Home Robertson: As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) just now, it is unfair and unreasonable to make such categorical assertions, which the hon. Gentleman simply cannot sustain. It is notoriously easy to construct academic data to justify almost anything, and I suspect that that is what has happened. I prefer to rely on common sense and experience, and my experience on Monday morning, when I saw off my sons to school at 10 past 8 in the morning in the extreme south of Scotland, was that daylight was just breaking. If the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West has his way, daylight would not break until an hour later. As a result, we would have

sleepy children joining buses or walking to school on icy roads, on dark, foggy mornings, and they would be at great risk.

I also base my opposition to the proposition on the experience of the 1968-71 experiment, when kids went to school in the dark. I remember it vividly. I was an agriculture student at the time and had to go to work on a farm not far from Livingston, in West Lothian. I remember seeing kids with reflectors on the backs of their coats going through the murky darkness on frosty roads before the salt had had time to take effect. One does not need to be clever to understand that that is dangerous. No doubt my hon. Friends who know the Communication Workers Union well will know that postal delivery workers experienced a 265 per cent. increase in accidents while going about their work in the mornings.

Mr. Bill Walker: The hon. Gentleman made great play of the different weather conditions. Will he remind the House that, in Scotland, we suffer from high relative humidity, and that drops in temperature immediately before dawn can create black ice?

Mr. Home Robertson: The hon. Gentleman is right, but it is a mistake to characterise this as entirely a Scottish-English debate. Similar circumstances can arise in Kent and throughout the United Kingdom.

Dame Angela Rumbold (Mitcham and Morden): I understand the hon. Gentleman's point about young children going to school in the early morning. When the previous experiment took place, I had to take my children to school in the dark, and I was not particularly happy about it. Collecting them in the evening was just as difficult because of the darkness, and it went on for longer. Does the hon. Gentleman think that a change would assist in that respect?

Mr. Home Robertson: I disagree profoundly. Because of the frost factor, there tends to be ice on the road in the morning rather than the evening. I put it to the right hon. Lady that commuters and children are more alert in the evening than they are in the morning, when they are going to work or school.

During the recent recess, I spoke to some of my constituents about the Bill. A number of building workers said, "Oh yes, we remember very vividly what happened last time round, between 1968 and 1971. Because we were not able to work effectively for the first hour in the morning because of darkness, our employers required us to work for an extra half day on Saturdays to compensate." I am not saying that that would happen again, but there is a risk of it.

I gently remind the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West and the rest of the House of the experiment between 1968 and 1971, when similar proposals were put into effect. They were violently unpopular and rejected in a free vote in the House by 366 votes to 81—in the light of pressure that hon. Members received from their constituents. I cannot see the case for trying this trick again.

The hon. Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) referred to Greenwich mean time; he was right. The global time zones were worked out more than 100 years ago by scientists who calculated the relationship between the hours of daylight and darkness at different points on the globe. The system was based on the Greenwich meridian.

I suppose that it was all down to that rogue Galileo, who said that the earth was in orbit around the sun. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West wants to amend that law—who needs Galileo when we have the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West, the 20th-century magician who seems to think that he can create "extra daylight" by means of his Bill? That is what it says in the Bill. He also has the cheek to call it a "British Time" Bill, when in fact it is central European time.

Mr. Butterfill: The Bill does not say that it would create extra time or extra daylight. It would create more usable daylight at times when people are normally awake. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the excellent statistics that the Library produced, he will find that they confirm that more usable daylight would be provided.

Mr. Home Robertson: I am sorry, but I can only refer the hon. Gentleman to the name of his Bill: British Time (Extra Daylight) Bill. There is no extra daylight and, I put it to the hon. Gentleman, it is not British time. I yield to no one on the matter of enthusiasm for the European Community. I am probably more European than any other Opposition Member. I voted for the Third Reading of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993 and I am in favour of the principle of a single European currency, but for goodness' sake, we cannot try to include a nation in the geographical position of Britain in central European time. It is absurd to put Britain into the same time zone as Warsaw, Budapest and Belgrade, where the sun rises an hour and a half or more earlier than it does here.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): On that theme, does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is wrong of some people to suggest that there is a magic wand to be waved and that, by changing the hours, we shall create a huge upsurge in business? The distance between Madrid and Berlin is about the same as the distance between Washington and Denver. There are three separate time zones in America, and we know that business life there is more vibrant than it is in the European Community.

Mr. Home Robertson: I am coming to that, and I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I cannot see the sense of putting Britain into the same time zone as that in central Europe, regardless of the time when the sun rises and sets. That would put Britain into an artificial time warp. Greenwich mean time would apply, for the time being anyway, in Tipperary and certainly in Timbuktu, but not in Greenwich or Greenock. It would be a silly idea.

I should love to know who is behind the daylight extra campaign. There is self-evidently an awful lot of money behind it somewhere. We have seen all the advertisements and all the rest of it, but I am not aware of any substantial support for the Bill from Joe Public in my constituency or anywhere else.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I should not dream of casting aspersions anywhere, but it has come to my attention that the Rank Organisation and strongly motivated leisure groups have gone bananas on changing daylight hours on the simple and simplistic notion that,

[Mrs. Teresa Gorman]

somehow, it will bring us more tourists. I cannot see the sense of it. The Rank Organisation has been mentioned to me.

Mr. Home Robertson: I am grateful the hon. Lady for letting us know where all the megabucks have come from to pay for the press advertisements.

Mr. Foulkes: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. David Marshall: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Home Robertson: This is too much; I cannot cope with all the interventions. Let us have my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall).

Mr. Marshall: My hon. Friend referred to support for the Bill. Does he find it strange that the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West could find only two farmers and one post office worker in Scotland who were in favour of the Bill, yet Strathclyde regional council, which has half the population of Scotland in its boundaries, and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, which represents all Scottish councils, have unanimously found that all the people in their areas are opposed to this bad measure?

Mr. Home Robertson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is always possible to find individuals anywhere who support almost any proposition. Public opinion in my constituency, in Glasgow and elsewhere in Scotland is absolutely against it.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): Will my hon. Friend tell me how he has measured the public opinion in his constituency? How many people have written to him? Has he or his local paper had an opinion poll conducted, and what are the results?

Dr. Godman: Ask him whether he has done the same.

Mr. Home Robertson: I confess that I have had precisely four letters on this subject from my constituency, two for and two against, but I do not rely only on the postman to gauge opinion in my constituency. I must tell my hon. Friends who violently oppose the Bill that I am out and about in my constituency quite often and I have talked with many Labour supporters.

Mr. Foulkes *rose—*

Mr. Home Robertson: I think that my hon. Friend will have to contain himself; we shall hear from him again.

We have made a little headway because we know a little more about who is behind the daylight extra campaign—certain leisure groups that think that they can make some money out of it.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East) *rose—*

Mr. Home Robertson: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, who used to represent Glasgow, Cathcart. He represents somewhere else now.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that my wife telephoned me two minutes ago to say that the "The Time, The Place" programme had conducted a massive telephone poll which showed massive public opposition throughout the United Kingdom to the Bill? Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, having been conned time after time over European integration by bogus organisations stuffed with Euro-funding, the public are becoming fed up and now do not believe a word of the nonsense propaganda in favour of this time change? Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the best way in which to gauge public opinion is an innocent telephone poll, which received a massive response and demonstrated massive opposition to this stupid Euro-integration measure?

Mr. Home Robertson: I am not remotely surprised to hear that that poll has demonstrated overwhelming public opposition to this dotty idea.

Mr. Bill Walker *rose—*

Mr. Home Robertson: The hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) can make his own speech in a minute. Oh, all right—I shall give way to him.

Mr. Walker: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that *The Press and Journal* in Aberdeen has conducted a large poll this week which clearly shows that 14.5 per cent. of those people are in favour and 86.5 are against?

Mr. Home Robertson: I am not remotely surprised by that evidence. It certainly confirms my own experience from the discussions I have had with my constituents and people elsewhere.

I suspect that the people behind the proposition are the dark forces in the City who want to be able to telephone Zurich without checking their watches.

Mr. Butterfill: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Home Robertson: We are told about the economic advantages which, it is alleged, will flow from the measure.

Mr. Butterfill: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that?

Mr. Home Robertson: The hon. Member has been on his feet for about half an hour. [HON. MEMBERS: "More."] I know that many others want to speak, and I should like to conclude my remarks as quickly as possible.

There are alleged economic advantages to be had from the measure; the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West referred to the interests of the banking industry and the financial sector. Many of the people who work in that sector live in my constituency and work in the insurance companies and banks in Edinburgh. I have no evidence that they are unduly enthusiastic about his proposal. I was advised by a banker earlier this week that it is an advantage to be in a time zone one jump to the west of central Europe, because it makes it possible to overlap with the trading time in New York, so there are arguments on both sides of this one.

Is it so difficult to cope with time zones? Australia has three time zones. I am not aware that its economy is grinding into the dust because its business men must take account of time zones when going about their work. The United States of America has five time zones. I am not aware of any suggestion that Chicago should be shifted on to New York time to facilitate business.

If the proposal is such a good idea, if it will make people so happy and be so good for tourism and everything else, will the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West tell me now—I would give way to him on this one—

whether there is any initiative in Germany for it to move on to Moscow time, or any initiative in Sydney to put it on to New Zealand time? If he is right that it is a good idea for Britain to be able to move an hour forward, presumably the same argument holds for people in other time zones. Logically, if that were so, time zones would be moving around the whole world again.

Mr. Butterfill: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, finally, for giving way. It is nonsense to suggest that countries would want to move time zones in the way that he says. May I deal, however, with his point about who is behind the Bill? All hon. Members have been sent a full briefing by the Bill's supporters. I have here a full list of the supporters, nearly 200 of them, and it is available to every hon. Member, most of whom have been sent the list of the people behind my campaign. In case the hon. Gentleman has not received it, I shall cross the Floor of the House and hand it to him.

Mr. Home Robertson: That is something to look forward to—the hon. Gentleman following the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Miss Nicholson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) across the Floor of the House.

Mr. Macdonald: My hon. Friend might like to know that I wrote to the daylight extra campaign asking who were the main donors to its campaign, and it refused to let me know. It just sent me a list of the organisations that were supporting the campaign, but no list of who was donating the money.

Mr. Home Robertson: I had the same experience. Last year, I saw one of the big advertisements in, I think, the London *Evening Standard* citing massive support for the Bill and giving the list. I wrote to the daylight extra campaign to ask who its backers were, and I am still waiting for a reply. We should be told. It would be interesting.

I have given some thought to the possibility that businesses, individuals and local authorities could counteract and sidestep the idiocy of this legislation by altering their timetables so that children could go to school during twilight at least, as they do now. I suppose it would be possible for local authorities, such as Strathclyde regional council perhaps, to opt to remain on GMT for the purposes of school timetables, but it is not as simple as that.

I return to my point about dairymen and the relationship between what different members of the same household do. Children going to school on one timetable cannot be detached from the timetable that applies to people going to work, bus and train timetables and all the rest of it. People cannot be that flexible.

The leisure industry, however, has some flexibility. There is nothing to stop people who are on holiday or those who have spare time playing golf later at night if they want to. I do not accept, therefore, that the Bill would make life much easier or be beneficial to the tourist industry.

I remind the House that this proposition was tried not so long ago. Most of us should be able to remember it. It was violently unpopular among all our constituents. Our predecessors and some hon. Members who are still in the House will remember the pressure that they came under when that experiment was rejected by 366 votes to 81 in the House. Do not let us make the same mistake again. Do not let is put our constituents through the same agony again.

10.54 am

Mr. John MacGregor (South Norfolk): As I shall refer to advantages to business, I should declare that I have a few business interests, and they are in the Register of Members' Interests. There is nothing wrong in businesses advancing, and putting to hon. Members, causes that they believe will be of a substantial benefit, not only to their businesses, profits and the United Kingdom economy, but to their employees.

The hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) advanced many strange arguments. One was that golfers could play at 11 o'clock in the evening and happily find their balls. Another involved who are the backers of the Bill.

I have come to support the Bill on the basis of my experience over many years, on what my constituents—not all of them, but by and large—are telling me and on my experience as a Minister and Secretary of State in a number of Departments that are relevant to the Bill. I was convinced then that this measure is right. It is supported not just by business interests, but by organisations such as the British Medical Association, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and the Police Federation—a large number of organisations that have got nothing to do with business interests. They support the Bill for all the reasons that my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West put forward. The point made by the hon. Member for East Lothian was therefore bogus and strange.

Equally irrelevant were the points that the hon. Member for East Lothian made about the European Union. The strangest letter that I have read so far on this issue was from a constituent who said that he was opposed to the measure because it was being imposed by Brussels: it is not. The business interest—which is the only one that is really relevant to the European Union—comes from what businesses feel, not from the single market, although there are benefits there, or from being members of the EU. If businesses want to do business in Europe, they find it better to move to the same time scale. It is an argument not about the European Union, but about the balance of advantage to business.

Mr. McWilliam: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacGregor: One of the problems is that many of the hon. Members who want to speak in the debate will not be able to if we give way to every time. My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West suffered from that.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on choosing this measure for his private Member's Bill. I strongly welcome it. As I have made clear, I have come to my view over many years, based on experience in many Departments. I shall not repeat all the arguments that he advanced, but they were compelling. As in all issues before the House, there are some losers as well as gainers, and I recognise that this time change will result in losers, but if we never took action in the House if there were losers, we would never make progress. There are bound always to be some losers.

[Mr. MacGregor]

Having listened to the debate over a long time, considered all the elements and again listened to the objections today, I feel that there are only two valid groups of losers: one is parts of, and certain groups in, Scotland—I readily acknowledge that. That is clear. The other is the postal workers, for about two months.

Sir Teddy Taylor: The Builders Employers Confederation is against it.

Mr. MacGregor: The building industry argument is bogus, because many construction companies are in favour of the change. In rural areas, small building firms are in favour of the change. People who find a particular difficulty can alter their working pattern in the way that has been done in other northern countries.

The strong argument involves postal workers, who are compelled to deliver mail by a certain time, but the disadvantage to them is for two months of the year, and there are advantages to many postal workers' families, who will be able to have leisure time during the extra hours of daylight when they leave their work, so there are even arguments there that are balanced in favour of this change. We are coming down, therefore, to a comparatively small number of losers.

I should like to put my own gloss on some of the points made by my hon. Friend in introducing the Bill. The argument that has gained most force with me since the last experiment 25 years ago is the safety argument, particularly for older people and single women. This is therefore not an argument about business or the European Union—it has nothing do with that. It is about the conditions, life style and wishes of this country's people.

It is fact of life that many retired people do not want to start doing their leisure activities in the early morning, not least because it is colder, and that they want to wait until the afternoon to do so. Many of the functions they attend inevitably take place in the afternoon. We all know that, compared with 25 years ago, problems such as fears of going out in the dark or of being mugged have greatly increased. That fear and perception is preventing many old people from undertaking such activities. I have not the slightest surprise that organisations such as Age Concern and the Suzy Lamplugh Trust are among the strongest supporters of the Bill. It has nothing to do with business interests: it has to do with life styles, and the change will have a beneficial effect on my constituents, many of whom are elderly and will be able to take advantage of the longer daylight hours.

Single women returning from work and women returning with their children from school will benefit from the fact that they will be doing so much more in daylight hours than at present. The safety argument is extremely strong, and there is also the life style argument.

I am totally convinced by the Transport Research Laboratory's studies on road safety. I do not think that the figures can be stated precisely by saying that definitely 110 road deaths would be avoided if we make the change, but the analysis is very clear, and perhaps links most to the point that the biggest saving would occur between 3 o'clock and 6 o'clock in the afternoon and early evening when there are most accidents. Therefore, it is entirely logical that the change will make a substantial difference to road safety. Whatever the precise figures, there is bound to be a big improvement.

This week, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland produced for the House an analysis by the Scottish Office. I have three comments on that. First, it is somewhat strange that, after three years, the analysis was produced only this week. It creates difficulties for those of us who want to look carefully at the analysis that it was put in the Library only on Wednesday night. Inevitably, it has been rather difficult to look at it. However, I have looked at it, and at the end of the executive summary there is a crucial point. It states:

> "The interim nature of these findings and the imprecision attaching to the estimates is stressed."

I suspect that that means that there is considerable doubt as to whether analysts and other experts, when they look at the figures, will completely agree with the conclusion. My second comment is that it is important to the debate to note that the imprecision attaching to the estimates and the interim nature of the findings are stressed.

My third and most important comment is that this new work says that, at best, the change in Scotland in terms of road safety would be neutral.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: At worst.

Mr. MacGregor: I say "at best" in terms of those who are in favour of changing the hours. At best, all it says is that the change would be neutral: it does not say that it would be a disadvantage in the context of road safety in Scotland. No group of experts and no analysis that I have seen suggests that there would not be a substantial benefit in terms of road safety in England and Wales. If it is neutral in Scotland and greatly beneficial in England and Wales, the road safety argument must be in favour of the change. That must be right. In terms of the overall balance of the argument, this makes very little difference.

Mr. Gallie: I think that my right hon. Friend ignores the De Montfort report, which takes a different view. He is being unfair to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, who has recently taken up that appointment and has pushed for a report that gives additional information that adds to the value of the debate; he should be congratulated on that and not criticised.

Mr. MacGregor: I was simply drawing attention to the difference that the report makes to the substance of the debate. My most important point is that, at best, from the point of view of the advocates of no change, all the report says is that in Scotland the change may not make a difference. It certainly does not increase the danger of road accidents.

Mr. Welsh: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacGregor: No, I do not intend to give way again, because I am anxious to leave time for other hon. Members. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that he can find fault with my analysis, he can do in his own speech. He cannot dispute the fact that the report says that the estimates are imprecise and perhaps doubtful. At most, it states that the argument for Scotland is neutral, and it does not attack in any way the substance of the findings everywhere else.

Mr. Maxton: As the right hon. Gentleman may know, Heriot-Watt university has carefully examined all the

research on this matter and has come down heavily on the side of the RoSPA evidence. It condemns the De Montfort report and says that there are enormous weaknesses in it.

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman because he has said what I was about to say, that Dr. John Russell, the dean of the faculty of environmental studies at Heriot-Watt, has made that precise point.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. MacGregor: I must make progress, because many other hon. Members wish to speak.

I shall now deal with the argument about tourism. In my constituency, and in the whole of East Anglia, tourism would greatly benefit, for obvious reasons. Tourists, especially those from overseas, tend not to make use of tourist facilities at 8 or 9 o'clock in the morning. They wish to make use of them after the sun has had its effect and when, in terms of a leisurely holiday, they are willing to do so, and that means later in the day. That is perfectly understandable, and I do not understand why much of the Scottish tourist industry does not see—I suspect that it does—that the tourist industry will gain substantial benefits from being able to keep facilities open for a longer period in daylight, when they are most used. That is why the industry has calculated that the change would benefit it by £1.2 billion.

The hon. Member for East Lothian spoke about the problems that would be faced by schoolchildren. However, my two local authorities and my county council, which deals with education, are the strongest advocates in my area for the change. I have had letters from both councils stating that they are in support of the change, and that has nothing to do with business interests or the European Union. They obviously take all those matters into account, and theirs is a substantial rural area.

Lord Vinson, the former chairman of the Rural Development Commission, wrote to *The Times* this week stating that he thought that the change would bring more benefit to rural areas

"than a dozen well-intentioned rural white papers."

He went on to say:

"A comprehensive survey carried out by the Rural Development Commission when I was chairman from 1980 to 1990 clearly showed that small outside contractors—builders, foresters, gardeners—would benefit greatly from an extra hour in the afternoon, as would tourism and sports through better utilisation of their facilities."

That is certainly what people in the rural areas in my constituency with which I am familiar, and elsewhere, feel.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. MacGregor: I am sorry, but I cannot give way.

I shall now deal with the issue of life style. The change would produce an increase of about 35 per cent. in daylight hours, during which people who want to engage in outside activities such as sport or gardening would benefit. I have found that large numbers of gardeners in my constituency prefer to do their gardening when they come home from work rather than before they go to work in the morning. Their wives also prefer to garden at that time. Those people will benefit from the substantial extra time, not just at the height of summer, but in the spring and earlier.

The measure will greatly benefit sport and recreation; that is why so many of the sporting organisations strongly favour the change. It has absolutely nothing to do with time zones or the European Union but relates entirely to people's life styles. It is subsidiarity at work in the United Kingdom, and that is another strong argument.

I shall now deal with the business argument. The hon. Member for East Lothian said that he preferred common sense and experience to dodgy data. He dismissed the data as dodgy because they did not support his case. Common sense and experience applies in the business world too, and those who run companies know when benefits are to be had from a change. It is highly significant that there are clear benefits not just in the City and not only in terms of the European Union but in dealing with far eastern markets, as Sir Nicholas Goodison, the chairman of the TSB, has said.

Large numbers of businesses throughout the country doing business in the European Union and in other European countries see clear benefits. The leaders of many British multinational companies made that clear in a letter to *The Times* earlier this week. The experience of the CBI, not just in the City and in the south but throughout England, is that a substantial number of business men are in favour of the change. Most of those who are against are in Scotland, and that brings me to the Scottish argument.

As a Scot, who attended St. Andrew's university, I well understand that there will be difficulties for some groups in Scotland. The main arguments that we have heard today are the only ones so far advanced against the Bill. However, it is clear that there are changing views among many Scots, and my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West made an important point about farmers. It used to be believed that farmers were among the groups most against a change. As a former Minister of Agriculture, who is still in touch with the agricultural community, I assure the House that that is no longer the case. Many groups of farmers know that the change would be beneficial to them, many are neutral on the subject and some are against, but it is wrong to say that the farming community is against it.

There would be considerable benefits. Of course, I understand that there are some beef and hill farmers in Scotland who will find the change unhelpful. However, when there are so many substantial benefits for the majority of the United Kingdom and an overwhelmingly compelling case, can we for ever say that, because of the disadvantages to certain groups of people in certain parts of the country, we should never make progress? That is the key point as far as the Scottish argument is concerned.

It is clear to me that, apart from all the other advantages,such as safety and life style, the savings to the economy from the benefit to the tourist and other industries will be massive. Those savings would have a far greater effect on the profitability and economic competitiveness of those industries than minor changes in interest rates or company taxation. We can make a change which may have some disadvantageous effects on some parts of country but which has huge benefits for the rest. We should not underestimate those economic benefits.

Even if the Bill does not make progress, the arguments that have been advanced have shown the benefits, and we would be right to make the change. I am very grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West for

[Mr. MacGregor]

enabling the arguments to be advanced and for showing just how narrowly focused on one part of the country the objectors are. The Bill's time will come, and I strongly urge the Government to have the good sense, if the Bill is not passed, to take it up as a Government measure.

11.14 am

Miss Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): I speak as a London Member of Parliament who strongly opposes the Bill. I must say—it has been mentioned already and I wish to reiterate it—that I regret the devious and almost, if it is not too strong a word, deceitful way in which the Bill has been presented and pushed. It has been implied that somehow we can produce extra daylight. The very name of the Bill, mentioning extra daylight, misleads people.

The whole case for the Bill is built on myths and statistics which we could argue about for the rest of the day, and on reports that other reports have disproved. As in every subject of academic research, we will be able to find academics who can point the argument in either direction. The only definite proof we have is the experiment that was carried out, and we know that the result of that experiment was that, by a very large majority—almost unanimously—hon. Members opposed it. I have not yet seen one bit of evidence that has shown that anything has changed since that original experiment.

Mr. Butterfill: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Miss Hoey: No, the hon. Gentleman spoke for an hour and he did not convince me. I do not think that he convinced many hon. Members.

I have made clear my views on the Bill in my constituency. I have also had four letters—two for and two against. I do not think that the Bill would make a positive difference for London people. In fact, I would argue that it would make many of my constituents' lives more miserable. Those people—there are not many of them in my constituency—who have a job, are already going to work and coming home in the dark. In London, the Bill would mean that even more people would have to go to work in the dark, and that would not be of any benefit to them. I admit that, in the summer time, it would be light for a while longer in London, but those people who want to get their children off the streets in the evenings and get them to bed at a reasonable time would find it even more difficult.

I strongly refute the evidence about accidents on the way home from school. As a child, I was not particularly awake first thing in the morning when I went to school. I walked down the road and got on the bus almost like a robot. More children going to school in the dark means a greater risk in the morning than in the afternoon. The rush hour extends over a longer period in the afternoon than in the morning, when everyone is rushing to get to work. Children would be more at risk, and not one statistic has disproved that.

I also refute the arguments about leisure, women and safety. People have talked nonsense about criminals. I have certainly got a few criminals in my constituency and they are very clever. They would not say, "My goodness, Members of Parliament have voted to change the time—that's ruined my way of making a living." They would just change the way they work. As a woman who runs in the morning, I believe that it would be more dangerous to run in the dark. Many women and men who go running before they go to work would find it extremely difficult—not in Scotland, which is another issue, but here in London and in other parts of the country.

The report from De Montfort is worth reading, and I hope that people have read it. It does not claim to have absolute evidence about accident statistics, but it refutes the specific link between darkness and accidents. Many other factors must be taken into account. The Bill is based on very little evidence and a number of myths. Moving the clocks forward has been promoted as some kind of magical change that would improve safety and our quality of life. It could not achieve those goals, and I believe that it would divert attention away from the real measures that are needed to improve safety on our roads. I urge everyone to oppose the Bill.

11.17 am

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I agree with the comments of the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey). We started with the fiction that the Bill would bring extra daylight, and the debate has already shown that there would be no extra daylight, only a redistribution of what is currently available.

We should consider the sponsors of the Bill. Only one is a Scot with a constituency in Scotland—the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton). The other Scot who has sponsored the Bill, my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor), represents a constituency that is east of Greenwich, where the Bill would probably have a more favourable effect that anywhere else in the United Kingdom.

It is notable that two other sponsors of the Bill, my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) and the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner), both voted against the summer time experiment in the 1970 debate. That was the only informed debate in the House that any hon. Member could remember. They voted against the experiment just after it finished, when road traffic accident statistics were up to date and all the information was before us.

That debate concluded with a vote on 2 December 1970, when it was decided by a substantial majority not to continue the experiment. As the hon. Member for East Lothian said, the figure was 366 votes to 81—a majority of 285. We cannot just throw that debate out of the window, because, as I said, it was held when everyone was on the ball about what had happened in the previous two years.

Mr. Maxton: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Hector Monro: Of course I shall give way to my pair.

Mr. Maxton: I am grateful to my pair for giving way. If he has read the Library research paper on the subject, he will know that, despite the large vote here against the experiment at that time, the public opinion polling evidence was then in favour of retaining the experiment, not getting rid of it.

Sir Hector Monro: The House should not legislate on the basis of public opinion polls and pressure groups. We should legislate as Members of Parliament representing our constituents. Those who oppose the Bill believe that

their constituents do not want it. The vote of 1970 should not be disregarded, as it was important and a true reflection of the opinion of the House. British summer time was discounted then, and is discounted now, as has been shown by the countless letters and newspaper correspondence over the past couple of months.

It is also wrong for my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West and others to disregard the De Montfort university research paper, which is just as well-founded as any of the other research papers that have mentioned. Research has been carried out at Heriot-Watt university, the Road Transport Laboratory and the Scottish transport office; they all have points to make that must be considered, not disregarded, as my hon. Friend did earlier.

Following the 1970 vote, a consultative Green Paper was introduced—Cm. 722 of 1989—and came to no conclusions. It rehearsed the history of the 1916 introduction for wartime reasons, and the 1939 defence regulations. But those measures were designed to help the war effort, and no assessment was made of their popularity at the time.

Cm. 722 accepted that there were severe disadvantages for many people and many widely different types of employment, but the Bill's supporters rubbish the attitude of those from Scotland, the north of England, Ireland, Wales and, of course, the west of England. The paper said that 86.2 per cent. of the responses from Scotland were in favour of the status quo, which did not include double summer time. There were only 25,000 responses in England in favour of the change to summer time.

Scottish opinion has been backed up by the *Scotland on Sunday* poll and by the Edinburgh *Evening News* poll, which were both conducted in recent weeks. Everyone should read the informed debate of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, which came down firmly on the side of the status quo.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: The right hon. Gentleman is a Scottish Member. Has he consulted the Scottish skiing industry, one of the most up-and-coming tourist attractions in Scotland? At new year, one of the most popular times for skiing in the Cairngorms, there is little daylight at the end of the day—it starts to get dark at 3.30 pm, and people are driven off the slopes. Does not the right hon. Gentleman consider that a change would improve the prospects for that important industry in Scotland?

Sir Hector Monro: It would not make the slightest difference. People have only to get up and be on the slopes at daylight, and they are ready to ski.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I have heard representations from the skiing industry, which is important in my area—I am sure the right hon. Gentleman appreciates that, as he frequently comes to my constituency. He will be aware that the last thing the ski industry wants is the possibility of people leaving the ski slopes at the very time that school buses, minibuses and parental cars are collecting children and are on the roads, as that would enhance the possibility of accidents rather than decrease it.

Sir Hector Monro: The hon. Lady makes an important point. If one is a keen skier, one will be on the slopes at the crack of dawn and daylight, and will remain there until dusk; it does not matter what the clock says.

Mr. Bill Walker: With his long experience of the sport, my right hon. Friend will have a greater understanding of what goes on on the ski slopes than the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell). Does he recollect that most of the business is carried out at the weekends? I say that as someone in whose constituency the skiing industry is active. As most of the work is done at weekends, changing the hours will not have any effect.

Sir Hector Monro: My hon. Friend is right—what the skiing industry needs is not more daylight, but more snow. We cannot be governed by polls or referendums. The polls very much depend on the question asked and the emotion put into it—particularly in relation to schoolchildren.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West believes in democracy, and it is not just a matter of simple majorities; we must understand the impact of such measures on all people; one must be considerate of others when making decisions. He said that the subject was a north-south issue, but it is as much an east-west issue. We must take into account the fact that Edinburgh is west of Liverpool—there is a north-west/south-east slant in the United Kingdom. The further west one goes, as the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) knows, the more serious the problem becomes.

What would the people of London say if the Bill were imposed on them and they were in darkness at 10.15 in the morning? I think that there would be a riot.

Mr. McWilliam: It would be a mistake to regard the vote as a Scottish-British one. Although I have a Scottish accent, I live in England, but I can see Scotland from my bedroom window. I think that I live slightly further north than the right hon. Gentleman.

Sir Hector Monro: I agree—I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has such a splendid view of something worthwhile when he gets up. But he would not see it at all if the Bill were to be enacted. I absolutely support him, and the north of England Members.

Apart from the hon. Member for Cathcart, no hon. Member north of Leicester has sponsored the Bill. People who know what the reality is would not sponsor the Bill, and I am surprised at the hon. Gentleman, although I do not want to disagree with him. When I drove to the Scottish Grand Committee in the morning on Monday, I had my car headlights on at 9.15 am—that would have been 10.15 am had the Bill been passed. It is ridiculous to think that we should be governed by pressure groups that advocate the Bill.

There has been no proper test of public opinion since the Vote in the House of Commons. I am disappointed at the number of pressure groups that have been peddling inaccurate information. Some people say that we should have two time zones in the United Kingdom. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West has never accepted that proposal, which is ludicrous. I live within 10 miles of the border, and if the time zone changed at the border, it would create problems involving trains, work and other matters. We should not even consider such a proposal.

[Sir Hector Monro]

The 1989 Green Paper, which was inconclusive, notes the strong opposition to change among those involved in trade, agriculture, forestry, the construction industry, and the manufacturing and distributive industries in the United Kingdom, and particularly in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

It was not right to rubbish the contribution of the Communication Workers Union. The letter from the deputy general secretary makes it clear. It states:

"On all these counts—and not least the effect this dangerous move will have on the country's postal workers—I ask you to vote against the Bill when it comes to the House . . . next week."

The union does not shilly-shally by saying that the Bill will not make any difference. It believes that the Bill would make a difference, and that is why I strongly advocate its view.

The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has also produced an excellent brief on the Bill. One cannot dismiss that document lightly, because COSLA represents all the local authorities of Scotland. It has gone to immense trouble to canvass each authority for its view, including my authority of Dumfries and Galloway, which is firmly against the Bill.

Mr. Maxton: The right hon. Gentleman was a Minister in the Government who introduced the poll tax in Scotland. COSLA sent him a brief condemning that outright, so why did he not listen then to what it said?

Sir Hector Monro: The hon. Gentleman is the last man I want to have a row with in the House, but he must not try to divert me into a discussion about issues in the dim and distant past.

The briefing from COSLA makes it absolutely clear:

"The introduction of Central European Time is rejected as this would only lead to darkness in Scotland continuing well into the morning."

We should support that well-argued brief.

Mr. David Marshall: COSLA has also expressed concern about the additional heating costs that would be incurred as a result of the Bill. It refers to public buildings, but the same argument could be extended to private buildings and domestic ones. People are having trouble paying their heating bills because of the imposition of VAT, so does the right hon. Gentleman not think it is nothing short of disgraceful that they would have to burn their heating for even longer should the Bill be passed? Does he share COSLA's concern about that?

Sir Hector Monro: I know that electricity has got cheaper as the months have gone by, and I do not want to discuss the VAT issue, but I accept that COSLA is right, and that the Bill would lead to increased heating costs for many people.

Road safety is the key issue upon which the promoters of the Bill have concentrated. They have done so not only because the facts are at their fingertips but because it is an emotive subject. I am not in any way complacent about the death of any child in Scotland or the United Kingdom, but we must look at the facts, and we should not be guided too much by the figures that have been presented.

The figures most generally quoted are those collected by the Transport Research Laboratory between 1969 and 1970. I do not believe that they can be extrapolated into 1996. We have every right to look as closely at the figures produced by the transport statistics branch of the Scottish Office, which are up to date—in fact, they were produced this week—as those produced by my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West.

People have asked deviously why those figures were published just this week, but we had to have those figures, because the Bill had its Second Reading today. If there had been no Bill, there would have been no hurry to get the figures, but that does not mean that they have not been accumulated accurately.

Those figures reflect the great changes in the past 25 years in the record on road safety. Britain is now, fortunately, at the bottom of the world league for road deaths. We have made tremendous strides forward, and I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Minister of State, who has done so much for road safety by introducing measures to change road design and lighting, and by introducing other safety measures and road calming systems. The changes in the drink-driving law have also made great differences. As hon. Members on both sides of the House already said, if the Bill were passed it would be difficult to continue the gritting and road maintenance that takes place early in the morning.

It is clear from the figures that there is no firm answer one way or the other. It cannot be conclusively proved that road safety would be enhanced by the Bill.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor), using his considerable knowledge, referred to the economic factors in favour of the Bill. Those benefits have been over-emphasised, because world financial markets are now particularly flexible. Everyone lives with fax machines, computers and God knows what, and the time zone is not crucial. Sometimes it is an advantage to have a little breathing space in the morning or in the evening when one is not in direct communication with one's opposite number in the world financial markets. It is important to record that the CBI in Scotland has come out 73 per cent. against the Bill, and that is what matters.

I am astonished by the efforts of my hon. Friends to suggest that the Bill does not matter to farmers. Of course it does. I am a farmer—that is in the Register, too—and I know what it is like to milk cows at 5.30 or 6 o'clock in the morning. Those in favour of the Bill should not try to quote one or two farmers and suggest that all farmers are in favour of the Bill.

The Scottish NFU has made it clear:

"The Union wants to maintain the status quo and seeks your support in ensuring that the Scottish farming industry is not severely disrupted by the introduction of this measure."

It could not be plainer—that is what the principal body representing farmers in Scotland thinks.

We do not want to be carried away with the arguments of someone with a multi-million pound combine, with traffic lights—I mean floodlights—a television inside, and all the rest of it, who may drive around his fields in Berwickshire or East Lothian. The hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) is well aware that I am talking about livestock farmers, who are preponderant in all aspects of farming in Scotland.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): My right hon. Friend is aware that he and I share a constituency boundary.

My constituency is further north than a lot of Scotland, which is possibly why I have found myself on the Scottish Affairs Select Committee.

Many livestock farmers cannot simply change their day as my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) has suggested, because many of them have other jobs. They cannot survive on simple hill farming. They have to get up early in the morning, check their beasts in the daylight, and then go off to work in forestry, driving lorries and other jobs. Often, their womenfolk do the same. It is impractical and impossible for those farmers simply to change their working day.

Sir Hector Monro: My hon. Friend could not put it better, and I know that he has great experience of what is going on in the hill farms in his area, which marches with mine on the border.

I do not want to discuss farming further, because it is plain sailing that the farming industry, irrespective of one or two farmers who have written to Ministers or Back Benchers, is against the proposed change.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The right hon. Gentleman and I probably have more knowledge of the farming industry in Scotland than his hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) does. Does he agree that, rather like the poll published in this morning's edition of *The Press and Journal*, farmers in Scotland will be 85 per cent.-plus against the measure from Bournemouth?

Sir Hector Monro: The hon. Gentleman has great knowledge of his constituency, and no doubt took with a pinch of salt whatever one branch of Buchan farmers voted recently.

The importance of the Bill to tourism has been grossly exaggerated. As far as I am aware, the Scottish tourist board is neutral on the Bill. We are concerned with what matters between 3.30 and 5.30 on a midwinter's evening in Scotland. Tourists are not particularly interested in travelling around on such days, and if they were on holiday, they would be enjoying indoor recreation rather than outdoor recreation.

It is making far too much of the Bill to suggest that it would help the tourist industry. Tourists are wise enough to know about daylight hours, and they will not travel to England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland just because they might get an extra hour's daylight.

Mr. Gallie: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the most pleasant times of day in Scotland is early morning, when the dew is on the ground, and the light is up at about 7 or 8 o'clock? Many tourists take advantage of that. At other times in Scotland, it is still daylight at 11 o'clock at night, so how much more light does the tourist want?

Sir Hector Monro: Those are good practical points.

I am sorry that the views of the police in Scotland appear to have been misquoted. The chief constables are against the Bill and the Scottish Police Federation, which represents the rank and file, is strongly against the Bill. It is wrong that its name should have been taken in vain by various organisations.

It is much the same with sport as it is with tourism. Goodness knows, I have been involved with sport as much as anyone in Scotland. If one wants to play a round of golf, one starts at 12 o'clock, whatever the time of dusk is in midwinter in Scotland. Not many people really want to play outdoor activities between 3.30 and 5.30 in the evening, when it is cold, miserable and damp.

There is no problem in the more formal games. They kick off at 2 o'clock in December and January in Scotland, allowing plenty of time for people to see the game played by 3.30 pm and get into the pavilion in the dark, and have fun and games for the rest of the night. The benefits of the Bill to sport are over-emphasised. There is no advantage in starting the game at 3 o'clock rather than 2 o'clock on a Saturday afternoon, when one has had all morning to get to the match, and the sooner one gets it played and into the bath and into the bar the better.

That goes for football, rugby, hockey and all other games. I am sure that even the skiers take a similar approach. I am glad that the Scottish Sports Council is neutral on the subject.

I do not accept the argument that my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) made about gardening. Who the hell will start digging their garden at 4.30 pm in December or January, when one should not be doing it anyhow?

Mr. MacGregor: I did not speak about December and January; I spoke about later months. However, is not the substance of my right hon. Friend's argument that there are differences in Scotland? Every single argument that he has made is regarded differently in other parts of the country.

Sir Hector Monro: No, I do not think so. Later in the year for gardening, one has daylight anyhow, so what is there to be fussed about?

The key is that the Bill is not wanted in the north of England or Scotland or Wales—or the west of England, I believe—and it is certainly not wanted in Northern Ireland. We have had excellent work and support from Sunrise. It has made good arguments, and many of us have been able to develop them today.

This is a very bad Bill for Scotland, and a bad Bill for England, especially the north and west of England, and for Northern Ireland. I hope that we shall do everything possible, not only to block the Bill today, but if necessary to block it in Committee.

11.41 am

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I shall be exceedingly brief, for a good reason. In all political parties, there are supporters of reform and supporters of reaction. My hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) wishes to speak on behalf of the latter, and I hope that, if I am brief, there may be time for him to speak.

The right hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) way well speak for Scotland—I do not pretend to do so—but he certainly does not speak for the west of England, or, I believe, for Wales. Any suggestion in what he said that he was so doing is outrageous, because it is not true. The argument is as much an east-west argument as it is north-south.

Mr. Maxton: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tyler: No; I shall not give way to anyone; I shall be very brief.

[Mr. Tyler]

As it is an east-west argument, it is sensible to quote the opinions of the Council of the Isles of Scilly—one cannot go farther west than that. The right hon. Member for Dumfries appeared to say that we should listen to the minorities and overlook the views of the majority, so let us listen to the council for the Isles of Scilly:

"It might be useful to let you know that the Council of the Isles of Scilly has backed the campaign now for some time. The Isles of Scilly Tourist Board passed its support for the campaign in December 1994 and reaffirmed their support in October"

1995.

"The second airing came about because a member of the Council wanted to debate the possibility of declaring unilateral Scilly time bringing us into line with Europe."

Mr. Home Robertson: That is what he is doing.

Mr. Tyler:

"Although members turned away from this delightful anarchy, it does serve to illustrate the strength of support"

that exists for that proposition,.

Mr. Bill Walker: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tyler: No; I will not give way.

That opinion is supported throughout the tourist industry, not only in Cornwall but throughout the south-west and southern England, and, to my knowledge, in most parts of the United Kingdom. The hon. Member for Dumfries referred to the opinions of the chairman of the Scottish Tourist Board, who gave a unilateral knee-jerk reaction to the proposition, without consulting his board. I should like to hear the opinions of all organisations in the tourist industry in Scotland.

Organisations such as the British Resorts Association, the Association of County Councils and the Council for Travel and Tourism support the proposed change. There is support throughout the holiday industry. In the premier destination area of the United Kingdom—Devon and Cornwall, which I am proud to represent—there is almost overwhelming support for that proposition.

I want to discuss especially the opinions of the farming industry, which have rightly been given much weight in the debate, but I fear not proportionately to the number of farmers in the United Kingdom. As part of my responsibilities in the House, I travel throughout the United Kingdom. I meet farmers and growers in every part of the United Kingdom. I discuss issues of policy and practice.

The issue that we are debating is not uppermost in those people's minds in any part of the United Kingdom. There are many much more important issues. In the past few weeks, I have attended county annual meetings of the NFU in many places. The issue has only been mentioned occasionally after the main business has been undertaken, and I have found overwhelming support for the change, for very practical reasons.

It is an urban illusion—one or two hon. Members who have spoken sounded as though they were falling for it—that farmers and growers are clock-watchers. Of course they are not. Their lives are dominated not by what the hands on the clock say, but by climatic conditions. They are dominated by the time of the year. They are infinitely adjustable. No farmer looks at the clock: he looks at the clouds. That is as true of Cornwall as it is of Scotland.

I am not a farmer, but I have lived all my life surrounded by farmers, and some members of my family farm. I know only too well that they adjust to the suitable conditions of their area.

It is true that there was concern among dairy farmers years ago when the experiment was undertaken, and when previous attempts were made to change the clock, for a simple reason. In those days, there was a fixed time for the arrival of the tanker lorry. That is gone. The milk tanker may arrive at any time in the 24 hours now—perhaps 3 o'clock in the morning. It does not make a ha'p'orth of difference to dairy farmers now when the dairy tanker arrives, because they have to adjust to their own concerns—their life style and their animals.

Livestock do not wake up to the alarm clock. They wake up to suit the time of day that the sun gives. Therefore, although nowadays some dairy farmers milk three times a day, or once a day—it is not always twice any longer—they are adapting to their own circumstances, and it is absurd to suggest that they will be put out by the clock.

The right hon. Member for Dumfries referred to some evidence taken from farmers some years ago. Let me bring him up to date. The Agricultural Development Advisory Service report, published in October 1995, said that the option covered by the Bill

"would lead to some required change to meet the needs of time critical operations. However, the negative impact of adopting either of these options"—

the other was an even more substantial change—

"is small and will be compensated by other advantages."

That is the carefully considered opinion of ADAS, and that is the view of the great majority of farmers in England and Wales. We have heard evidence of farmers from Scotland taking a similar view, and I can quote a farmer in East Kilbride, who writes:

"What is even more of a puzzle is the impression that 'Scotland is against' such reform. This is rubbish!

As for my fellow farmers; this area is all dairy and at this time of year the herds are kept inside and as far as I know all of them 'have the electric'!"

There is no unanimity of view in the farming community in Scotland, and there is overwhelming support for the change in England and Wales.

Of course this is a matter of balance. Often, issues that come before us in the House are a matter of balance. We must weigh in the balance whether the strong view of a very small minority must be allowed to overwhelm the argument, to the disadvantage of a very considerable majority—the overwhelming majority of the holiday industry, and, in my view, a very considerable majority of farmers and growers throughout the country.

After all, farmers and growers often operate in areas of sporadic development where the roads are poorly lit. Their children are as much, if not more, at risk on long-distance journeys to and from school during the dark evenings. Farmers have children, too, and many farmers have told me that their family concerns would override any minor misgivings they might have about their working lives.

I have not been a Member for Parliament for very long—although I was here some time ago. I have watched the proceedings of Parliament many times, and I have found that, if one is not sure which way to vote, it is good practice to look at those who offer reasoned arguments in

support of either side. If in doubt, one should look at the friends of an argument, as one can learn a great deal from them.

Those hon. Members who favour reform might like to take note that the hon. Members for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), for Chingford (Mr. Smith) and for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) and the right hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth)—

Hon. Members: And the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce).

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: And our right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith).

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon for that gazetteer. I regard the hon Members for Billericay, for Southend, East, for Chingford, for Tayside, North and the right hon. Member for Stirling as an excellent traffic light—to adopt the expression of the hon. Member for Dumfries. When they say stop, I want to go.

11.49 am

Sir Peter Lloyd (Fareham): I agree with the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) on almost every point. He is quite right to say that farmers look not at the clock, but at climatic conditions. Any change to daylight hours will prove inconvenient for some of them, although it will be very helpful for others. However, it is not a prime consideration for most farmers, who make up their minds individually about the wider issues—particularly about any effects on their families and their wider social life.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) on introducing the Bill. He has not chosen the easy option; he has not picked up a Government handout. Nevertheless, it is an important issue, which must be debated seriously and thoroughly. It must not be evaded or giggled into touch merely because it has created very real controversy, particularly in one part of the United Kingdom.

My hon. Friend spoke most effectively, and I will not recapitulate his points exhaustively. He covered a great many of the reasons why many organisations—including those associated with business, but many others with no such connections—support the change that his Bill would introduce. He explained why public opinion in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, as measured by public opinion polls, shows such strong majorities in favour of the measure, and why there is clearly solid support for it in Scotland, as well as the strong opposition that always arises when the matter is discussed.

The Bill assumes that, as daylight hours are short in winter, we must adjust the clock to make the very best use of the available daylight. No setting is ideal to meet everyone's work, school and leisure needs. However, it is plain that most people can make better use of daylight in the late afternoon or early evening rather than first thing in the morning. That is particularly true of sporting and leisure activities, and moving the clocks forward in winter would give people an average extra 50 minutes of daylight in which to pursue those activities.

That is why the measure would be disproportionately beneficial to those activities, and why it enjoys so much support from the organisations that promote sport, tourism and leisure. It is no wonder that they have come out very strongly in favour of the Bill. Some of the organisations are commercial bodies and some are not, but their names can be found on the list of supporters because they know what the public, who take advantage of their services, really want.

Many people, particularly the elderly, feel that they are trapped indoors by the dark when the sun sets very early during winter. Fear of crime or accidents keeps them inside, cutting them off from friends and social activities for a considerable part of the day during much of the year. It is no wonder that Age Concern also supports the Bill.

The police believe that lighter evenings will reduce the kind of crime that is usually committed under cover of darkness. Some of those criminal activities may take place later during the night, but certainly few will be shifted to the early hours of the morning. As my hon. Friend said, burglars are not noted for being early risers.

The hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam) asked, why then are the police deployed more during the day than at night? The answer is quite simple. First, the police, like everyone else, would prefer to work during daylight hours; and, secondly, the public like to see the police on the beat during the day. However, if the police were better deployed, many more would work during the late evening and at night. Their crime prevention hours should not coincide entirely with the times that crimes are committed, because criminal cases must be investigated and solved, and it is better to do that during the day. The hon. Gentleman made an interesting point, but it does not support his other arguments.

The most striking argument in favour of the Bill is the analysis produced by the Transport Research Laboratory, which shows that there will be substantial net reductions in accidents if single/double summer time is adopted. I shall not dwell on it, because my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West has explained it at some length. It was also mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor), who has great experience in these matters as a former Secretary of State for Transport.

The findings of the Transport Research Laboratory have just been reviewed and endorsed by Dr. John Russell of Heriot-Watt university in Edinburgh, who will have no southern bias.

It is therefore surprising that, at the eleventh hour, the Scottish Office has produced a paper that suggests that the Transport Research Laboratory and Herriot-Watt have got it wrong. But perhaps not so surprising, as my energetic right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has not been at the Scottish Office very long. No doubt he wanted to galvanise the Department to find any evidence that the important work carried out by the Transport Research Laboratory was wrong.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Is the hon. Gentleman familiar with the work of Strathclyde region, which was not produced at the last minute but was carried out over a number of years, examining figures from the 1990s? Its conclusions were directly contrary to those of the Transport Research Laboratory. Will the hon. Gentleman concede that research finds on both sides, not one side, of the argument, and that the report produced by Strathclyde region represents a powerful argument for Scottish Members?

Sir Peter Lloyd: I am happy to concede that the statistics are complicated, and that there are differences of

[Sir Peter Lloyd]

opinion. The fact that we have only just received the research by Scottish Office—not all the figures are available—is a good reason for considering the Bill in Committee, where hon. Members can examine the figures. I support the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) in his request that the Bill should be committed to a Special Standing Committee. It would be valuable and right to consider all the arguments.

If the findings of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland are correct, that proves only that the Bill would make no difference to accidents. We would still have to consider all the other arguments, which are considerable. However, my right hon. Friend has helped to shoot down one of the main arguments of those who oppose the Bill—that it would lead to more accidents involving children travelling to school in the morning.

Perhaps the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) will have the opportunity to make a speech enlarging on that point. He believes that it will make no difference.

Mr. Salmond *rose—*

Sir Peter Lloyd: If the argument is between those that say that it will not have much effect on accident figures and those who say—with very good evidence—that it will make a great deal of difference, we should not just give the Bill a Second Reading, but ensure that it reaches the Statute Book, so that we can test it out.

We should not bandy across the Chamber light-hearted aspersions on research with which we may or may not not agree. If the Transport Research Laboratory research is right, we could be saving lives. It is much more serious than looking at all the research and taking our pick of that which coincides with our prejudice.

I would be happy to support an amendment in Committee to adopt the change for two years. There should then be a review and a new vote as to whether it should continue. It is difficult for those who argue that it will not make much different to cast aside the opportunity to test the opinion—which many believe to be well-founded—that it would save lives and prevent injuries.

Mr. Salmond: The result of the trial run between 1960 and 1971 was a huge vote in the House to discontinue the experiment. I did not cite the Scottish Office report, but that of Strathclyde region, which is devastating in its indictment of the Department of Transport figures, and reaches exactly the opposite conclusion from studying actual road conditions in Scotland. Scottish Members of Parliament are much influenced by that report.

Sir Peter Lloyd: If the hon. Gentleman is serious about serious research, he must agree to give the Bill a Second Reading, so that it can be fully discussed in Committee. Important matters should not be dismissed and thrown aside with comments across the Chamber that cannot be based on analysing research that does not support the views that some hon. Members hold.

Mrs. Helen Liddell (Monklands, East): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that pilot studies undertaken by Strathclyde region in 1986 and 1993 specifically examined the effect of change across the region? Strathclyde is roughly half the size of Scotland, so it encompasses a wide range of weather conditions. Strathclyde region's research clearly places a question mark over research extrapolated 25 years ago. Should we not be taking decisions based on up-to-date evidence, such as that of Strathclyde region?

Sir Peter Lloyd: The Transport Research Laboratory tried to take into account all the changes since the original trial. The results of the trial period were not available to the House when it decided to end it. We should seriously study all research by competent people, and it is doubly incumbent on us to do so when research reaches different conclusions.

We are talking about people's lives and serious injuries. It behoves us to reach a proper decision, and we cannot do that unless the Bill goes into Committee. At this point, I am convinced by the Transport Research Laboratory's findings, which seem much more thorough—but, unlike some right hon. and hon. Members, I am more open-minded, and would like to examine all the research further.

The least important benefit is that to UK industry, including in Scotland, of using the same time zone as the rest of western Europe. As a long-standing Eurosceptic, I do not want to follow Europe for the sake of harmonisation, but believe that being on the same clock will help this country more than our competitors. As the UK is one hour behind the rest of Europe and it is one hour ahead, it is more difficult for UK business people to attend a day's meeting on the continent than for Europeans to come here. The lack of congruence of office hours hurts us more than them. That is not a decisive point, but it is part of the argument.

Small businesses are certainly in favour of change. My hon. Friend the Minister might find interesting a letter that I received from the Federation of Small Businesses, which ends:

> "If there was a choice between the 1996 Finance Bill and Mr. Butterfill's Private Member's Bill (which would advance by one hour, the time for general purposes throughout the year and lead to the above advantages), then I think I know which one the business community would like to see on the Statute Book."

Perhaps the Government should withdraw the Finance Bill, and give the time over to my hon. Friend's measure.

The European Commission has never sought to impose CET on this country, but it is determined to synchronise the end as well as the start of summer time across the European Union.

The Commission is doing so by bringing the rest of Europe into line with us and adopting our change date at the end of October. The way is now clear for us to do ourselves a favour by simply not putting the clocks back in October 1997. We will not get an extra hour in bed on that occasion, but we will almost painlessly acquire the advantages of lighter winter afternoons. The decision should be taken in the light of our needs and interests, not those of Europe. On this matter, the Commission has not been pressing us to come into line with the rest of Europe—for once.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West on promoting this Bill, and I am sure that he will understand if I say that I am sorry he had to do so. I hope the Bill gets on to the statute book, but the odds are always against a private Member's Bill such as this.

I believe that the issue should have been brought to the House by a Government Bill on a free vote, although I understand why the Government have not yet done that. I am sure that they feared that the measure would get embroiled in the arguments over Europe, but I believe that the decision of the EU to follow us on the end date has removed that worry. The total lack of pressure to change our clocks to CET underlines that view.

More important, the Government were reluctant to ride roughshod over what appears to be Scottish opinion, and I do not want to do that either. The Government are right to heed Scottish feelings, but public opinion polls and plenty of Scottish organisations have shown that the Government have probably overestimated the hostility of Scots towards putting the clocks forward. I know that a number of Scottish Members of Parliament feel exactly that, and the Government may have heavily underestimated the support in Scotland for the measure.

Support for the measure in Scotland will grow as the benefits and disbenefits of the change are thoroughly discussed, for all the benefits that apply to England, Wales and Northern Ireland will apply also to Scotland—particularly, according to the Transport Research Laboratory, those related to road accidents.

If my hon. Friend's Bill does not get through—I hope it does—I hope that the debate that he has set in train will lead to a more thorough and serious discussion in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, so that, at a later stage, the Government can introduce a Bill that comes to a sensible conclusion that suits the whole of the United Kingdom.

12.6 pm

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): My immediate predecessor as the hon. Member for the Western Isles spoke at length the last time that the House debated this topic in 1970, and I am grateful to have been called to speak today. It is instructive to look at that debate in 1970, because a number of supporters of the change today have made the point that individuals, groups and some hon. Members in Scotland are in favour of the change, and that was exactly the case then as well.

Among those speaking in favour of the change in 1970 were the hon Members for Dundee, West, for Glasgow, Provan and for Motherwell. Indeed, the then hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland voted to continue the experiment in 1970. There always will be a small number of people within Scotland who are in favour of such an experiment, but the fact is—as that debate showed—that they are overwhelmingly outnumbered by those who are bitterly opposed to it.

Among those speaking violently against the 1970 experiment were many hon. Members from south of the border. Hon Members from Buckinghamshire, Newcastle, Liverpool, Westmorland, Preston, Sunderland, Ipswich, Manchester, Dorset, Wiltshire and Chippenham all spoke strongly on the basis of real experience—not on the basis of a hypothetical projection—against the experiment, and that is why it was cast out by 366 votes to 81.

Contrary to the expectations of those who are on the margins of supporting the proposed change, they will find that, instead of it being welcomed and popular among constituents, if it is implemented, it will be bitterly resented.

We have heard much about the merits of various statistical analyses. The most important quality that we can bring to the debate is not numeracy or the ability to manipulate statistics but imagination. We need to imagine what it will be like if the proposed change is implemented. We need to imagine what midwinter mornings will be like when dawn arrives one hour later than at present. What will it be like for ourselves and our constituents to get up in pitch blackness, organise families in pitch blackness, get the children to school in pitch blackness, get ourselves to work and start to work in pitch blackness? We need to imagine exactly what that will be like.

Mr. David Marshall: My hon. Friend has described graphically what we all think will happen. Does he agree that one of the worrying trends in modern-day life is the number of people suffering from depression? There is nothing more depressing than getting up in darkness every day. Does he share my concern that, if the Bill were to become law, there could be a substantial increase in the number of people suffering from depression? It is a serious point that should concern us all.

Mr. Macdonald: I agree with my hon. Friend, and I am grateful to him. To get up in darkness is depressing, because it is profoundly unnatural. Our ancestors did not do it, but we have to because we must work in an industrial time scale. I have asked colleagues to imagine what it is like because most of us do not experience it, but we who live in the north and west already experience it. We do not have to imagine what it is like, because we live it during our winters.

Dawn in Stornoway today was almost exactly one hour after dawn in London. If the Bill is enacted, the impact upon places north and west in the United Kingdom will be profound. Stornoway will not become light until after 10 am. That is why I have received a vast number of representations from head teachers, schools, chambers of commerce, the tourist board, crofters and community councils in my constituency. They are all violently opposed to the proposed change.

I suggest to right hon. and hon. Members, especially those who admit, as I think the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) has, that—although they are in favour of the change—the argument is finely balanced. If it is considered that the benefits that might come about are marginal, they should weigh seriously the impact upon the communities that will be profoundly and adversely affected by the change; even though those communities may be small and remote. I do not think that Stornoway will be the worst-affected community. Probably the worst affected will be communities in the west of Northern Ireland. They should be considered as well.

The proposed change was voted out in 1970 because it will affect not only the north and west. We are talking not only about Scottish communities, farmers or people living in the north of the country. If the Bill becomes law, it will have an effect on the whole country. If it is enacted, London will henceforth experience, every winter, the same mid-morning darkness that we in the Hebrides presently experience. London will move to Stornoway time.

I suggest to colleagues from the south and the east who are tempted to vote for the Bill and who plead with us to experiment a little that we do not need to experiment. All they need to do is come to the north and the west and try

[Mr. Macdonald]

things out for a winter before inflicting what we experience on their constituents. I warn those colleagues that I do not think that their constituents who live in the south and east will thank them for putting them on Stornoway time. They will not find it a pleasure or a relief; they will find it instead a dark, depressing and miserable experience.

Mr. Duncan Smith: We have heard the arguments for the change—about the forecasts and the prospects—but does the hon. Gentleman agree that, when one looks at the arguments against, it comes down to the simple fact that we did it once and it did not work? If it ain't broke, why fix it?

Mr. Macdonald: The hon. Gentleman sums it up well and aptly. In the north of Scotland, we have to live with dark midwinter mornings. That is a geographical fact that we simply have to accept, but I cannot understand why those who live in the south and east of the United Kingdom should want to join us in that gloom. It would be touching, but completely barmy.

There has been much argument about the statistics, and hon. Members who find it difficult to argue the case on its sheer merits are falling back on statistics about accidents and road safety, but I believe that, when one looks at those statistics, one will see that they just do not stand up. We heard much about the accident rate for road users, but what about other groups—children, for example? The Government's White Paper, produced in 1989, examined all the arguments at that time, and I have had the benefit of seeing the report from the Transport Research Laboratory as well.

The White Paper warned specifically that the change could lead to more—not fewer—accidents involving children. On page 13, paragraph 41, the White Paper says:

"More school children would go to school in the dark in winter and would therefore be more exposed to danger."

That warning is repeated in its conclusion. Proponents of the change must seriously consider the impact that it will have on children, not simply because children are an emotive group but because they are not responsible for their own safety. We are responsible for their safety.

The change will affect other groups as well. Farmers and crofters will be more at risk, as will construction workers and postal workers. I find it astonishing that the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, which supports the Bill, has not evaluated the impact on those other groups. When I asked it why it was supporting the Bill, it simply came back with data about road safety. It had made no study of the impact of the change on other groups in the community.

Mr. McWilliam: I recall that, many years ago, there was a break in the Meteorological Office telephone line to RAF Turnhouse, outside Edinburgh, which also served Edinburgh civil airport. It was an emergency. It had to be fixed. The wind was coming in at about 50 miles an hour and it was full of sleet. It took two of us, anchored to each other, to get up there and get that line repaired. If the Bill had been in force, it would have been pitch black at that time in the morning. As it happened, mercifully there was still some light, but it was an extremely dangerous thing to have to do.

Mr. Macdonald: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that point.

If one disregards the impact that the change will have on children—which we should not do—and other groups in the community, in terms of the great likelihood of accidents, we are left with the core of the argument for making the change: the claim that it will reduce the number of road accidents and the fatalities that result each year. I find it a deeply unimpressive argument. I do not want to go into the other reports that have been produced to show how unimpressive the argument is, as other colleagues have mentioned them already. I shall simply accept on its merits the case that has been made by the proponents of the change, and weigh up what they are claiming.

The proponents claim that, based on a 25-year-old experiment projected into a hypothetical future, the net reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured on the roads would be 1.18 per cent. That figure is contained in table 7 of the Transport Research Laboratory's report. The overall reduction in casualties is predicted to be only 0.67 per cent.

We should look at those figures in perspective properly to understand the claims that have been made for the enormous change that the Bill would introduce. For example, the latest projection for road fatality reduction is 110 each year, as the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) said at the beginning of his speech. If we compare that to the actual reduction in 1991, based on the statistics provided by the Department of Transport press office, we find that road casualties declined by 649—not 110—in 1991, by 339 in 1992 and by 415 in 1993.

I acknowledge that every life is important. However, set against those year-on-year real reductions, a one-off hypothetical reduction of 110 is comparatively a drop in the ocean of the campaign to make roads safer.

Mrs. Gorman: I was a young schoolteacher at that time, and I recall the number of children who came to school on icy pavements, who slipped over and who had very bad accidents, including broken wrists and ankles. Those statistics have not been taken into account in the debate, let alone the number of old people going to work at that time in the morning.

Mr. Macdonald: That is a good point, and I am grateful to the hon. Lady for making it.

I have compared the claimed reductions with the real reductions that are achieved each year because of road safety improvements. Another way in which to examine the merits of the case made by the proponents of change is to compare the schemes that have been specifically designed to reduce accidents. The Transport Research Laboratory, which produced the much-cited report on improvements in road safety achieved by the changes in time, has produced other reports that examine specific traffic-calming schemes and their impact on road safety. I have received copies of those reports as well.

Specific road safety schemes, such as traffic-calming schemes and road humps, have reduced accidents not by the 0.67 per cent. which it is claimed the time change will achieve, but by 71 per cent. across the areas in which they were introduced. That is what I would call statistically significant, and a real and credible effort to improve road safety. I believe that it puts the projected reductions from the proposed time change in their proper perspective.

I ask a question of all hon. Members who support the Bill and, in particular, the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West who has proposed it. If they are seriously concerned about road safety, why does he not propose a private Member's Bill on traffic calming—for example, road humps around schools in all urban areas? He could achieve massive reductions in casualties and accidents, if he really wanted to achieve that. The road safety argument is, at best, irrelevant and, at worst, an obvious and blatant attempt to divert people from the real choice that they must face. It is an attempt to sugar a pill that people would otherwise find bitter.

I have no doubt that, if the Bill goes through, people will find, as they did in the late 1960s, that is a hateful and deeply unpopular experiment. It will be unpopular because it will not be right not only for communities such as the one that I represent in the Western Isles, but for Britain as a whole.

12.25 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): When the hon. Member for the Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) re-reads his speech in 20 years time, he will find two major flaws in it. The first involves the statistical information about the Bill being unpopular. After the experiment 25 years ago, the information from the opinion polls showed that more people were in favour of continuing that experiment than of stopping it. To stand up and say what he did 25 years later, when the information in the House of Commons brief shows that the majority of people wanted it to continue, is to turn statistics on their head.

The second thing that I hope that the hon. Gentleman will notice is his use of the statistic that there will be a cut of, perhaps, 1 per cent. in the number of road deaths. I thought that the number of deaths on our roads is slightly under 3,500 a year, 1 per cent. of which is about 35. The estimate that most people are willing to accept is that we shall prevent about 110 deaths a year. That strikes me as being 3 per cent., not 1 per cent. The hon. Gentleman may have been talking about overall casualties, including the vast number of slight casualties. There may be some other figure, but my estimate is that the saving of 110 lives is about 3 per cent. of our annual road deaths.

Mr. Macdonald: I am using the Transport Research Laboratory's figures. If the hon. Gentleman considers table 7, he will find that the figures for overall casualties, slight ones included, is 0.67 per cent., but that the figure for killed and seriously injured is 1.18 per cent.

Mr. Bottomley: The figure that the hon. Gentleman later used for the number of lives was 110, which, I estimate, is around 3 per cent. of our road deaths.

According to the figures as first calculated, we might have saved more than 230 lives a year at the time of the experiment. Since then, however, as the hon. Gentleman has rightly said, we have made a significant improvement in reducing deaths on our roads. They are down to under 3,500. They may go up and down occasionally. I hope that the secular trend will continue downwards.

Let me take the average number of lives that would have been saved in the United Kingdom during the 25 years that we have not had the casualty-saving time arrangement, not as 230 or 110, but as 150 a year. That means 3,750 fellow citizens in this country have died unnecessarily because the House of Commons has not taken those lives seriously.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Bottomley: I will not give way now. I am making my own speech.

Across the nation, we rightly know about the child who, on a newspaper round, was crushed by a lorry. That is newsworthy. I am not arguing that this change of time would have saved her life, but the fact that she died in a road crash is national news. Think of that death multiplied 3,750 times since Reginald Maudling was Home Secretary, when he said that it seemed obvious that people who opposed the case felt more strongly than those who supported it.

I am in the House of Commons today to say that I believe that saving those 3,750 lives was a responsibility that the House of Commons should not have ducked. We pay attention when it is reported that there is an increase in the risk of thrombosis by the use of a contraceptive pill. That becomes national news, but we can let 3,750 people die unnecessarily in the past 25 years, partly because some people, such as the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson)—although this is not a party issue—say that he prefers to rely on common sense and experience rather than on the information that is there from the "Stats 19" report and from police services across the country.

If the Bill receives a Second Reading, I shall at once propose that the special procedure that would allow some of the information and disputes on casualties to be taken into account. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) would say whether he accepts that proposal.

Mr. Butterfill: Many hon. Members have called for the Bill to be referred to a Special Standing Committee, and on that basis I would not oppose such a motion.

Mr. Bottomley: The House should be grateful to my hon. Friend, not only for introducing the Bill and for his speech in which he gave some of the reasons why some people are opposed to the measure, but for his generosity in accepting that, if the Bill receives its Second Reading, the Special Standing Committee procedure can be used. As I say, that will allow casualty figures to be compared and discussed. It should be possible to get people from Strathclyde, from the Scottish Office and from the Transport Research Laboratory together. If that happens, we may discover that there is far less disagreement than appears in the debate.

I am glad that the Government decided not to privatise the Transport Research Laboratory, because we must be able to have confidence in its work. If a major problem arises between statisticians in the Scottish Office and the TLR, I suspect that what will become the national statistical organisation will get them together and sort it out. The reason for setting up the old Central Statistical Organisation was to make sure that Ministers, Parliament and the country had the benefit of agreed figures.

Casualties have been reduced because, in general, Government and Parliament have formulated policies that work. I regret that there is a growing trend of introducing measures, either for our own reasons or because of Europe, that do not necessarily work. The idea that a

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heavy goods vehicle driver must be able to read without glasses even though he requires them is ludicrous. The case for a ban on coaches using the third lane of motorways is unsubstantiated by the facts. However, whether casualties will be reduced by the proposed time change is not seriously disputed.

The figures from the experiment some 25 years ago show that the gains in Scotland were at least as great as those in other parts of the United Kingdom. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West said, there are many reasons for believing that they were better. I do not argue that conditions in the north of Scotland are the same as those in the central belt. The mass of Scotland's population is in the Strathclyde region, in the central belt. If the debate concerned only Scotland and was taking place there, and those of us from England, Wales and Northern Ireland were ignored, the debate should conclude that the change would be beneficial to Scotland and should be supported by its people.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is being politically quite clever, because by giving the impression that he is not yet convinced by the arguments, he allows the debate in Scotland to take place without the partisan "Let's all knock the Government" approach that might otherwise occur. I pay tribute to him for that. In view of that stance, I hope that people in Scotland will leave party politics to one side, will become involved in the argument, and will demonstrate to my right hon. Friend and the House the overwhelming view that the change would benefit Scotland as a whole. I cannot argue for every person in Scotland: only for Scotland as a whole.

When I last asked questions on this subject, I was told by the then Secretary of State for Scotland, probably the one who estimated that there would be a significant saving of lives in Scotland when the measure was adopted, that there was no law telling farmers in Scotland at what hour they should go into the milking parlour. He also confirmed that there is no law in Scotland saying at what time building contractors should have their staff or self-employed subcontractors on site. It is up to people to make their own arrangements.

I shall now switch from the issue of casualties to the interests of the elderly, about which my right hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd) spoke. In his constituency, the elderly make up about 17 per cent. of the population. My right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins), who is one of the sponsors of the Bill and to whom I referred in 1986 as one of the wise and honourable people in the House, has 35 per cent.—twice as many—people who are retired in his constituency.

As has rightly been said, those elderly people, in my constituency and elsewhere, value the extra hours of daylight at the time that they want to use it. If we, as Members of Parliament, write off the interests of those pensioners and retired people who want to be active, but who draw back into their homes when it gets dark, we would be betraying them. In the same way, we would be betraying the active young who, after school, want to get involved in worthwhile activities outside their homes. There is much to be said for video games, television and other activities that people do at home, but there is even more to be said for worthwhile activities such as the scouts, the Woodcraft Folk, athletics and other sports, and drama and music.

For all those reasons, as well as for the business ones—although the business people can speak for themselves—let us remember those people who get killed because in the House we have not bothered to take their interests into account in the way that we should.

12.35 pm

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): I do not want to challenge the good faith or sincerity of the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) in this matter; nor should he challenge that of hon. Members who take a different view. This is not a black and white issue, but one which requires very fine judgments and careful analysis.

Some of my best friends in the House will vote for the Bill, but I am strongly opposed to it. That is partly because I worked for the Communication Workers Union as its head of research for some 14 years, when I studied the matter carefully. I say with pride, and no defensiveness, that that union continues to have a relationship with me through supporting my local constituency office, but if it did not, I would still take the same view on the Bill, because it involves wider issues.

The arguments that the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West and his supporters made in favour of the Bill are based on extraordinarily extravagant claims. The Bill is supposed to be a magical measure. It is argued that tourism would boom, trade would be boosted, leisure would be all-pervasive, and we would become a nation of evening golfers. Crime would, if not disappear, be reduced, and accidents would fall. With the exception of the issue of accidents, to which I shall return, those arguments are pure fantasy.

The idea that, if we changed the clocks by one hour, we would arrive at some kind of semi-utopia is nonsense. It is a product of lobbies with a phone, a fax and a fictionary. The arguments are extremely creative, to say the least. I have read that tourism would increase by £1 billion a year as a result of changing the clock by one hour. That stretches all credulity.

Are we seriously being asked to believe that people would decide whether to come to Britain on holiday on the basis of whether the clocks were put forward or back one hour? Imagine the scene in Europe. Families all over Europe are looking at brochures to decide whether to come on holiday to Scotland, Wales or England. Is it seriously argued that family Schmidt in Germany, family Le Brun in France and family Gonzales in Spain will decide, as they look through their brochures, to come to Britain because we have moved the clocks forward an hour? It is pure nonsense. Families might decide to come to Britain if we managed to get rid of some rain, but not because of a change in the time. We can dispose of that argument quickly.

The next argument that is advanced concerns trade. It is claimed that, if we brought ourselves into line with most—although not all—of Europe, our trade would jump up. We have had an accelerating increase in trade with the rest of the European Union although our time has been different from that in virtually all other European countries. That is a matter of fact, and the Bill would not change one jot our ability to trade with the rest of Europe. Indeed, it would harm the British economy, because we

would be less able to trade easily with the United States of America—a point made by the chief executive of a Scottish engineering firm on the "Today" programme this morning. We have a window of at most two hours in a normal working day to do business with America, and that small opportunity would be reduced. The argument that the change would affect our trade with the far east is nonsense—the time difference with the far east is so great that it would make no difference.

In America, the fact that there are five time zones—if we include Hawaii—makes no difference to the country's ability to trade across its states. In many respects, it trades more efficiently than we do in Britain with a single time zone. We live in a global economy of 24-hour currency, financial dealings and business ventures.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham (Perth and Kinross): Does the hon. Gentleman, with whom I agree, agree that trade between this country and Spain and Italy is far more disrupted by the three and four-hour lunch breaks in those countries than by the small matter of a one hour time difference?

Mr. Hain: The hon. Lady makes a valid point: the siesta factor is greater than the one-hour factor.

We are invited to believe that leisure will become easier because of the time change, but that argument is advanced against a background of British workers working longer than anyone else in Europe. Their hours have increased substantially over the past decade. There is not time for the average British worker to enjoy the extra hour that he or she would allegedly have in the evening. The argument is nonsense.

We are invited to believe that crime would be reduced. My hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey) made the point tellingly: the idea that the average criminal will alter his or her behaviour in response to a time change is fantasy. Such people are reasonably bright: if they are able to rob, mug and commit other crimes, they will do so regardless of whether the time changes by one hour. I shall rely on what the Home Office told the UCW journal a little over a year ago in 1994, when it said that, on the matter of crime,

"there has not been one piece of definitive evidence in support of a shift either way."

Mr. John Marshall: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, when the previous experiment took place, there was no evidence that the level of crime changed as a result? It is fatuous to suggest that one thing or the other would help; people should look at what happened during the experiment, when no reduction in crime could be related to the change.

Mr. Hain: I could not agree more with the hon. Gentleman, who has made his point effectively.

On the subject of accidents, may I say—particularly in response to the rather highly charged speech of the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley)—that I have two boys. They are now hairy teenagers, but a few years ago they were tiny children. If I thought that it could be shown definitively, to my satisfaction, that, as a result of the change, accidents involving children and children's deaths would be reduced, that would weigh heavily on my mind. I have not been convinced. As my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) so ably demonstrated in a devastating indictment of the sort of analysis of accidents that is put forward by the Bill's supporters, they have not proved their case.

Many wild claims about accidents have been made on behalf of the Bill's supporters. I am not saying that they are cooking the figures, but they are being highly creative. I shall rely on the words of a Home Secretary, Reginald Maudling, who commented on the then Road Research Laboratory analysis of the same figures, which are now given in a different fashion in this debate. He said:

"The figures are not clear enough to base a decision upon."

That was his conclusion at the end of a two-year live experiment. He also drew attention to a

"sad increase in child casualties between 6 pm and 7 pm"—[*Official Report*, 2 December 1970; Vol.807, c.1335.]

The Pedestrian Association on Road Safety reported a net increase of 44 fatal child casualties in the first two years of the experiment. Parents with children were also up in arms about that experiment. We have already heard that, according to a national opinion poll conducted in February 1970, 79 per cent. of parents wanted a return to the old system. Parents were also concerned about the safety of paperboys and girls in the early morning dark hours. That factor has not been mentioned up to now.

An independent report entitled "The case against a move to Central European Time" has been produced, not by some partisan trade union outfit, but by the centre for occupational and environmental health policy research at De Montfort University, Leicester. It points out how complicated it is to make easy judgment on the accident figures. The report states:

"Claims that a move . . . would deliver a reduction in road traffic casualties are not proved. There is some evidence that road traffic accidents would in fact increase."

It details a number of arguments why the accident figures relied on by supporters of the Bill do not stand up. It also draws attention to a House of Commons Library research paper, published in 1993, which concluded:

"the possibility of a small net increase in child and road casualties . . . cannot be ruled out."

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To add to the figures the hon. Gentleman has given, has he noticed those in the House of Commons Library brief, at the end of appendix 1? The figures for children between the ages of five and 15—which includes those of school age—killed or seriously injured during the experiment showed that, instead of the expected increase in accidents in the morning, there was a reduction of 14, and a reduction of 319 in the evening. Both figures are statistically significant.

Mr. Hain: I do not dispute what was reported in the House of Commons research paper, but the conclusion is slightly different from that reached in an earlier one. I could quote all the figures that my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles mentioned and the others that I have noted, but their significance is finely judged.

It is important to consider the number of workers who would be affected. In Britain, 1.6 million people are early morning workers. During the previous experiment, it was noted that, in the fourth quarter of 1967, compared with the fourth quarter of 1968, the number of building workers who died increased from 35 to 44, and accidents were up by 265.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Can my hon. Friend tell me whether the De Montfort report was prepared by

[Mr. Paul Flynn]

scientists who have world-class reputations as authorities on road safety statistics or by people in other specialties? The reports from the Transport Research Laboratory, which have been updated, have been accepted for many years as proving that the change suggested in the Bill would save at least 100 lives a year.

Mr. Hain: My hon. Friend may have a valid point—I pay tribute to his sincerity—in comparing the validity of the TRL report with the university report, but those reports must be weighed in the balance, and I do not think that we can dismiss the De Montfort report lightly.

During the previous experiment, the fatality rate per 1,000 construction operatives went from 13.5 in 1967 to 18.9 in 1969. That was the only occasion when the otherwise steady improvement in safety conditions on building sites was reversed.

According to the National Federation of Building Trades Employees, the experiment between 1968 and 1971 cost the building industry an extra £30 million. I asked the Library to update that figure to its current value, and it appears that the cost to the building industry would be £245 million. The business case advanced by supporters of the Bill must be weighed against that cost.

Government figures show that, during the experiment in 1968 to 1971, the number of accidents suffered by Post Office workers between the hours of 7 am and 9 am more than doubled from 1,104 to 2,287. Those were official Government figures.

The Post Office conducted a survey during November to February when the changes occurred—during the early morning darkness period. It found that the accidents to postmen while on delivery or outside work increased from 1,262 before the experiment started to 2,242 in the second year of the experiment—a massive increase. The Post Office also noted that there was a general increase in the time taken to complete first deliveries and that an increased number of lamp batteries and torches had to be used.

There are 90,000 Royal Mail delivery staff, of whom 10,000 are women, which was not the case during the experiment, as there has been a massive increase in the number of postwomen during the past 20 years. They must usually leave the sorting office by 6.45 am and they are out in the streets delivering between 7 am and 9.50 am in London and between 7 am and 9.30 am elsewhere. If the change were made, throughout most of the country in midwinter, postmen and women would make the entire first delivery in darkness. That is dangerous, not only because of weather conditions, but because of the risk of muggings. Postmen and women refuse to deliver in some no-go areas because of crime and attacks on them.

Mr. Flynn: So that we may assess the importance of those accidents, will my hon. Friend tell us how many of those additional accidents were fatal, how many caused serious injury and how many were trivial?

Mr. Hain: They were mostly serious injuries. I can go into detail if my hon. Friend wants me to, but I discussed that matter to some extent earlier.

What are the opinions of postmen and women throughout Britain? In England, Postman Pat is cross, in Wales, Postman Dai is angry and in Scotland, Postman Jock is livid about the prospect of the change.

Miss Hoey: And Postman Paddy.

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): I am probably one of the very few hon. Members who have climbed a telegraph pole. Before I came to this place, 23 years ago, I was a Post Office telephone engineer, which is why I am very interested in what my hon. Friend has to say about our postal colleagues. I hope that he will remember that British Telecom engineers are required to climb telegraph poles in the dark, which is a hazardous business. I am therefore fully with him in opposing the Bill.

Mr. Hain: I thank my hon. Friend, and I pay tribute to his distinguished service as a telecommunications engineer before coming to the House.

Postman Paddy is also extremely angry, as my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey) says.

Wales, being further west and further north than almost every other part of the country with the exception of Scotland, is worse hit than anywhere else except Scotland. Many parts of the Scottish nation will not see sunrise until 10 am. In most parts of Wales, the sun will not rise in midwinter until after 9 am. In the north of Wales, in places such as Wrexham and Aberystwyth, it will be nearer to 9.30 am.

Almost everywhere in Wales will be worse off. Even in a south-eastern city such as Cardiff, there would be a loss of 54 days, when sunrise would be 9 am or later, compared with a gain of 50 days when sunset would be as late as 5.30 pm. Wrexham would lose 62 days, when sunrise would be 9 am or later, compared with a gain of 43 days when sunset would be as late as 5.30 pm.

In the following towns, where the sun would not rise before 9 am, Swansea would lose 56 days, Pembroke 58 days, Aberystwyth 57 days and Llandudno 62 days of morning darkness.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): I am listening with interest to the distribution of days lost and days gained. I want my hon. Friend to explain to me, because I cannot quite understand it, how the Bill would affect the rotation of the earth to create a loss or a gain of days.

Mr. Hain: My hon. Friend is a good friend and I said at the beginning of my remarks that other hon. Friends, like him, will be voting on the other side of the debate. I do not challenge his sincerity, but he does not understand my point. In the city of Cardiff, in his constituency, the sun will rise later than 9 am on an extra 54 days. That is the point that I am making.

Mr. Flynn: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hain: I am sorry, but I must make progress, although my hon. Friend is a close friend. He said that he would heckle me in this debate, and I am enjoying the experience.

Almost 90,000 outdoor workers in Wales would be affected by the change. They would include farmers, building workers, milkmen, postmen, postwomen and others. In the winter, they would stumble around in the dark in icy, wet and snowy conditions. Schoolchildren, old people, car drivers and early shoppers would be in

much greater danger. Many roads in rural and in valley areas, such as those in my constituency, do not have pavements and, as a consequence, pedestrians also would be at greater risk.

In conclusion, I must draw the attention of Members of Parliament from Welsh constituencies to what occurred when the issue was last debated substantially in this place in December 1970. The then hon. Member for Carmarthen, Gwynoro Jones, spoke about the widespread opposition throughout Wales, especially rural Wales, to the change that had occurred. I also remind the House that Wales Members of Parliament opposed the change and voted overwhelmingly to reject the experiment.

For me, the clincher to this argument is what occurred last time. We are not talking about hypotheticals or the analysis of figures or statistics upon which we can draw different conclusions. The British Standard Time Act 1968, which imposed an experimental period of daylight saving between 27 October 1968 and 31 October 1971, was rejected overwhelmingly by the House because it was a disaster.

It is fascinating and instructive to scrutinise the debate of 2 December 1970. It followed what the then hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton, Mr. Eric Heffer, described as a "revolt from below" against the change. The debate also referred to a national opinion poll survey of February 1970 which found that 58 per cent. of the public opposed the change. That is not a matter of opinion; it is a matter of fact. The Government White Paper Cmnd. 4512 was released in 1970. Paragraph 18 states:

> "North-west of a line running from Devon to Tees-side, particularly in Scotland, people, especially women, the elderly, and outdoor workers felt greatly inconvenienced by the change and strongly favoured a return to the old system".

They were the results of a contemporary analysis conducted at the time; they were not a retrospective invention of views or a reconsideration of the statistics.

Did the House of Commons go out of its mind in rejecting that experiment? Did it suffer some kind of a spasm? It did not, because it had learnt from the experiment. Hon. Members rejected the measure by 366 votes to 81—not a narrow margin, but a decisive majority. We are now being asked not so much to take a leap in the dark, as to take a leap knowing full well all of the dangers and problems that caused the abandonment of that same leap last time. I hope that the Bill will be defeated.

12.58 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Tom Sackville): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) on introducing the debate. However, I cannot be as helpful as I would like, as the Government are neutral with regard to the British Time (Extra Daylight) Bill.

Today's debate fills me with a sense of relief that the Government continue to be neutral. I shall not waste too much time rehearsing all the arguments which are being made so eloquently, because that would take time from the many Members who wish to speak. I would also be in danger of displaying my own prejudices.

There are strong views on both sides of the argument. Among the advantages cited for the change is the anticipated savings in road casualties. In that connection, I confirm that the Transport Research Laboratory research published in 1989 suggests that a change to single/double summer time would result in a general reduction in casualties in Great Britain. On the other hand, an interim report published on Wednesday by the Scottish Office suggests that the effect in Scotland would be neutral.

It has been said that the change will benefit tourism and outdoor leisure activities. As has been mentioned, there could be benefits for elderly people who are fearful of being out after dark. In that connection, Home Office analysis of British crime surveys concluded that, although fewer offences are committed in daylight, increasing evening daylight could have different effects on different crimes—in other words, the data are inconclusive. However, the Government have received representations from Age Concern and other organisations that suggest that longer evenings could reduce fear of crime, particularly among the elderly.

We have also been told that among the advantages cited for the change would be easier travel and business communications with continental Europe. On the other side of the argument, those who urge the retention of the status quo point to the drawbacks of darker mornings.

Mr. John Marshall: Is my hon. Friend aware that the change in the hour proposed by the Bill would create difficulties for certain religion communities? Is he aware that, for orthodox and observant members of the Jewish community, their festivities are determined not by the hour of the day, but by sunrise and sunset. Their morning prayers would have to take place an hour later, the Yom Kippur fast would be broken a hour later, and in the summer Shabbat would go out a hour later. In London, that could be as late as midnight. It would cause great difficulty for some members of the community.

Mr. Sackville: That is an interesting point, of which I hope House will take due note.

Mr. Butterfill: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Sackville: I shall not give way again, so as to allow time for hon. Members who are waiting to speak.

On the side of those who wish to retain the status quo, darker mornings and icy roads could cause more accidents. Dark mornings would have a disproportionate impact on those in the north of the country and those who work out of doors. The Government recognise that many people in Scotland are concerned about the proposed change.

On a technical point, if the Bill were to become law, the change would take effect at the end of October 1997. The clocks would not be turned back one hour as usual, keeping Britain on GMT plus one hour for the winter months. The clocks would go forward in March to GMT plus two hours for the summer. That would move Britain into the time zone known as single/double summer time, or central European time.

I confirm that, technically, such a changeover would be feasible, although we have heard representations from those who operate charter airlines about the time lag needed to renegotiate landing slots.

I want to make it clear that this is not a party political issue and the Government maintain a neutral line, but I very much look forward to the House reaching a conclusion on this long-debated matter.

1.4 pm

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): I join the Minister in congratulating the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) on instigating this lively and interesting debate. We are put in our best light when we discuss issues as we find them.

We were told originally that there would be a free vote among Government Members, but that prompts the question, when is a free vote not a free vote? The answer is, when representations have been made to the Prime Minister by the right hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), who was apparently told by his advisers that a number of Scottish seats might be vulnerable were the Government to back the Bill.

Normally, the right hon. Gentleman is not a man of caution but when it was pointed out that his own seat is one of the most vulnerable, he uncharacteristically displayed the cautious side of his nature and convinced the Prime Minister of his view. Apparently, a free vote is not a free vote when it is a neutral vote. I understand that Ministers will abstain—except Scottish Ministers, who have been given been given a licence to vote against the Bill.

It might be thought that people who live in glasshouses should not throw stones. I am not sure whether I am in an enviable or unenviable position, as a party spokesperson without a specific policy. [HON. MEMBERS: "He's not the only one."] I thought that that might provoke Conservative Members. Like other hon. Members, I have my own prejudices. My postbag on the subject has not been extensive. I have received few letters from my constituents, although a number of organisations with a vested interest one way or the other have made representations to me.

Perhaps I ought to declare an interest, as a Monday morning runner along the banks of the River Tyne. It would not suit me personally if the measure were implemented, as I would have to run in the dark a number of extra mornings in winter. I will not let that consideration prejudice my overall position or the view I take of my constituents' preferences, although I imagine that their prejudices are similar to my own.

Mr. Salmond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Henderson: No, because that would deny time to other hon. Members who wish to speak. I will look to see which hon. Gentleman behind me asked me to give way. Having done so, I will stick to my original decision.

Transport systems, especially those closely linked with Europe, would clearly benefit from time co-ordination, and obviously it would suit business organisations to have similar starting and finishing times as the rest of Europe. Many arguments have been made about the benefits that the change would bring to tourism, especially in respect of afternoon activities. However, like my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain), I am not convinced that anyone would choose a holiday destination on the basis of the time zone in a particular location.

I understood also the forceful arguments made by my hon. Friends the Members for Neath and for Wigan (Mr. Stott) and by my close colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam), in an intervention, when they spoke of the difficulties that the Bill would create for many early-morning workers—particularly postal workers, who have an obligation to deliver mail early in the day. The construction industry has changed from years ago and would be affected less, but still significantly.

Several hon. Members spoke about the Bill's effect on Scotland and the north of Scotland, many economic interests, and people's life styles. No one put that point better than my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald), who said that, before people vote for change, they should live in Stornaway in winter and see if they really like it—a telling point on behalf of people living in the northern part of the kingdom.

I see many elderly people in my constituency walking to clubs on winter afternoons, and arguably they would benefit from the Bill.

Miss Hoey: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Henderson: No, I do not think that I should give way.

I have not followed some of the arguments that have been made, such as those made by farmers—but, there again, perhaps I have never understood the arguments made by the farming community. That community usually makes its arguments in a united way, but it appears that farmers are divided on this matter, depending on which part of the country they farm in, and what type of farming they are involved in. I am not sure that the House is able to divide on the basis of what we have been told by farming interests.

The most specious arguments made by the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West and his followers have been on the subject of crime. I have no doubt that the criminals in Newcastle will be happy to thieve at time-and-a-half or double time if that is all that is available to them, and they will not be influenced by the proposed change.

On accidents, I—like a number of hon. Members—could be heavily convinced by arguments about not only road safety but other safety issues, but I am not convinced that the argument is telling either way. I have seen some arguments that having more daylight in the afternoon will reduce accidents, but they are countered by those who say that more accidents will be caused by more icy and foggy mornings.

Labour Members have been given a free vote, and will make their minds up based on some of the arguments that they have accepted and some that they have not. It is their decision and, on this occasion, they will have to do without the excellent assistance usually provided by hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon). I am sure that they will manage today.

1.11 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): When I woke up this morning, I looked in my wardrobe to see what I ought to wear to suit the occasion. Should I wear my tartan weskit—it is a good Tory tartan—to express my support for our good friends from north of the border, with whom I have the greatest sympathy? Or should I put on my iridescent armbands and my yellow fluorescent flak jacket, because that is what children used to wear to school in the days of the horrible experiment?

I was a young schoolteacher in those days, and I remember my depression at having to get up in the pitch dark and go to work on icy pavements. We keep hearing

in this debate about road accidents, but we have heard nothing about pavement accidents. Lots of children had bad falls on their way to school in the pitch dark. I remember children being half asleep in a class with all the lights blazing. I even remember that the third of a pint milk bottles took an extra hour to thaw out. We had to postpone the time that the children could have their school milk, because there was not enough daylight to thaw the bottles.

Those are the real facts of life during that nightmare experiment. In Britain, people tend to expect small children to go to bed around dusk, but parents had a devil of a job getting their children to bed at the usual time. It was broad daylight, and the children wanted to be up and outdoors because, in those days, they could play outdoors.

I was surprised by the argument that my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) advanced on that subject, since parents these days do not let their children out to play after school, because they are frightened of leaving them alone in the street. The argument that they will be given extra time to play is bogus in today's unfortunate circumstances.

The experiment was thoroughly disliked, and if we are concerned mainly about our children—as we should be—we should not be listening to arguments from well-heeled business men who want to catch planes one hour later to go to business meetings in Brussels, if that puts our children to the bother and danger of going out in the pitch dark.

We also worried in those days—

Mr. Butterfill: When my hon. Friend refers to fat cats, is she talking about the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents or the Child Accident Prevention Trust, both of which support the Bill?

Mrs. Gorman: I am interested that my hon. Friend should raise that point. We tend to think that the people or organisations that give us fancy statistics in great glossy journals—paid for the by the poor old taxpayer, of course—always get it right. The Transport Research Laboratory got it all wrong when we were contemplating the M1 and the M25—I remember these things, which shows how old I am. Its usage figures were completely wrong. The M1 was much too small, as was the M25. As I have said, the laboratory's predictions were completely wrong. We must not take too much notice of statistics. We all know that it is possible to prove anything.

Is the House aware that there are statistics that tell us that, if we are exposed to more sunlight, we are more likely to get skin cancer? We are told that we will have more leisure time if the Bill is enacted, and that we shall be able to roam around in the summer. What will we do with all the people turning to the national health service with lumps and bumps all over their skin?

Mr. Maxton: When the hon. Lady dismisses road accident statistics and other research, she reminds me of the addictive smoker who refuses to believe that smoking causes lung cancer or heart disease.

Mrs. Gorman: We all know that the conditions on our roads now cannot be compared with safety measures such as lollipop people.

I remember people complaining bitterly about their electricity bills when we last conducted the experiment. Schools and businesses used much more electricity because of the dark mornings.

Most of the arguments about safety are bogus, not least because everybody knows that car drivers, early in the morning, are much more likely to be grumpy, sleepy and dopey as they drive to schools. When the previous experiment took place, if someone did not get knocked down by a bus or a car, there was a good chance of suffering a fracture on his or her way to work.

It is not only children who are out early in the morning, or middle-aged people. Elderly people go out to work in the early morning on slippery pavements. Watch the people leaving this building who have come in to clean for us in the early hours. About 60 or 70 per cent. of them are women in my age group.

Miss Hoey: Does the hon. Lady agree with me that, in her constituency and mine, elderly people are to be seen queuing outside post offices waiting for them to open? If the Bill is enacted, they will be queuing in the dark in London.

Mrs. Gorman: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Does my hon. Friend agree that the vast majority of schoolchildren go to school in daylight and return in daylight? If the Bill is enacted, the vast majority of schoolchildren, if not all of them, will go to school in the dark, and gain no benefit at the end of the day.

Mrs. Gorman: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend.

There is also the television factor. We have time zones for television. After a 9 pm, 10 pm, or even later deadline, the blue-movie brigade get their wares on the airs. If children are all to be up and bright and watching television, what are we to do? Are we to shove soft porn into the small hours of the morning? That might be a good idea. It will be difficult, however, to control children's viewing. They will be wide awake and wanting to watch television at 11 pm, I promise the House. That will still be daylight to them in the height of summer.

We have heard so much about polls: people being polled for this and for that. We have heard about the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents in that context. Many of those polled seem to be in what I call the soft underbelly of employment. They are the white-collar chaps who leave home at 8 am to go to work. They do not have to be in the office until 10 am. The great majority of working people, however, are not in that category.

Mr. Home Robertson: Essex men.

Mrs. Gorman: I shall come to them in a moment.

I am talking about people who have to leave their homes early in the morning. To force them out an hour earlier—that would be the effect of the Bill—would be cruelty, in my view.

I have conducted a straw poll of my own—of the infant school teachers circa 1968-71. I have not yet found one who thinks that we had a good time in those years, or that we should repeat the exercise. I want that poll to go on the record.

I have also done a poll of my Essex men and women who come up to the City to work, and there are a great many. The City relies on the talent and enterprise of that much-maligned person—Essex man and Essex woman.

[Mrs. Gorman]

They tell me that the extra hour earlier start than the continent is an enormous financial advantage. I do not understand about City trading and stocks and shares; I am only a humble ex-schoolteacher turned politician.

Essex man tells me that, of course, the people in Europe want this change, because it would put us at the same disadvantage as them, because they cannot get up a bit earlier in the morning. I asked why these hard-working Germans, who, as we keep hearing, work twice as hard, could not get up a bit earlier. He said: "Their infrastructure won't stand it." Apparently, they cannot get the buses going early enough to get them into their offices in Frankfurt or wherever.

Whatever the reason, we have a big advantage in those markets. Essex man and Essex woman do not want this change, because it will affect their standard of living and their income, and I am in favour of keeping that as high as possible.

I want to talk about builders. Everybody talks about the matter from the perspective of the worker. I shall speak from the perspective of the employer. I remember that, during the previous experiment, as I am wont to do, I was in the middle of restoring a house. *[Laughter.]* It has been a long-term habit of mine.

I remember that the workers who came in an hour earlier—as it were, in terms of daylight—were the very devil to get working. They lit a brazier in the garden. They started toasting lumps of bread, eating sausages, making mugs of tea, and would not start work until dawn. I reckon that I was paying for an extra hour in the day for which no work was being done at all.

It therefore does not surprise me one little bit that the Building Employers Confederation has written to us all to say that it is

"strongly opposed to this Private Members Bill",

because it will interfere with work patterns. I can tell the House that that is true, because I have witnessed it.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): My hon. Friend has quoted from the excellent brief sent to Members by the Building Employers Confederation, but she has failed to say that it is the leading representative body of builders and construction companies, unlike the Confederation of British Industry, which has been notoriously dishonest, as ever, in the survey that it carried out, and has entirely failed to represent the interests of agriculture or the construction industry, putting them instead in a category of "other", as against manufacturing and financial services. I support my hon. Friend, but a very large percentage of business is against the Bill.

Mrs. Gorman: When did my hon. Friend ever not make a valuable contribution to any debate? I thank him for his intervention.

Now I shall say a brief word about the effect that the proposals will have on personal lives—not the magnificent statistics that we keep hearing about—because that is the level at which we should be considering the matter, and on people's day-to-day existence. People are creatures of habit, and do not want their world turned upside down unless there is some very cogent reason for doing so. They certainly will not think that the boffins in Brussels or Berlin, or anywhere else on the continent, are important enough for them to have their whole life pattern and that of their children turned upside down.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West mentioned the fact that animals on farms would not be affected because they go by their own biological clocks. Well, sheep have them. Cows have them. But so do people. We all have our own internal rhythms. We wake up with the dawn. We have all watched animal programmes and seen animals waking up in the morning, coming to life as the mist rises over great horizons.

Sir George Gardiner (Reigate): And the dawn chorus.

Mrs. Gorman: We hear the dawn chorus and we see life going quietly to its rest as the sun sets below the horizon.

My point is that to change things like time for such trivial reasons as the wishes of a handful of business men would be a most improper and inadvisable measure for any political party to be seen to support. We are, after all, sent here not in the interests of minorities of one sort or another, but to do the best we can for the great majority, particularly the relatively unheard and inarticulate people we seek to represent.

I should like, last but not least, to bring to the attention of my Conservative colleagues in particular the advice that our Prime Minister gave on "Breakfast with Frost" the other morning, when he gave an excellent presentation on Conservative policy. One of his cogent remarks was that we should stop changing things in our society just for the sake of it. If it is not necessary to change, it is necessary not to change—if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

I call on all loyal Conservatives, not least my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West, to follow the Prime Minister's advice. There is no public clamour for this measure. Nobody wrote to me about it until my hon. Friend began to present his case, after which most of the people who wrote to me said, "Don't do it."

People have strong memories of that depressing event 20-odd years ago; they still remember it. It is at our peril that we turn their lives upside down for such a tawdry and trivial set of arguments.

1.26 pm

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): I find myself in agreement with the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) and popular opinion in Essex, and it is an awesome experience. I should like to make a long speech, but it will be short because I know that other hon. Members wish to contribute to the debate.

After listening to the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill), I am utterly convinced that the Bill is a con trick. His arguments and statistics were hanging on a very shoogly peg indeed. His road accident statistics are based on an extrapolation from figures from the 1960s and they are hypothetical. I recommend that he reads the updated figures issued by the Strathclyde regional road department, which take into account much wider figures and criteria than those on which the hon. Gentleman bases his case.

The hon. Member for Bournemouth, West made a weak argument on behalf of business—he apparently has not heard of modern telecommunications. He was completely wrong about opinion polls. When the hon. Gentleman was

faced by Scottish opinion, he simply chose to ignore it. It will not do for the hon. Gentleman to use the opinion of one farmer to dismiss that of the National Farmers Union or the opinion of one postal worker to dismiss that of the work force. If anything is clear in Scotland, it is the massive opposition to the measure.

Mr. Butterfill: That is not true.

Mr. Welsh: Again, when the hon. Gentleman hears Scottish opinion, he does not wish to listen to it; he ignores it. Scottish farmers, local councils, businesses and the Scottish people generally oppose the measure, and speak of the real danger of the measure, and the damaging consequences that would occur if it were implemented.

I will acknowledge one success in the hon. Gentleman's Bill: he has achieved something unique. He has united all four party leaders in Scotland—the Secretary of State for Scotland, the right hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), the hon. Members for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) and for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), and my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond). That is an achievement indeed. The four party leaders say that they reflect the broad wishes of the Scottish people in opposing the measure.

Dr. Godman: May I point out to the hon. Gentleman that a measure of this sort should be introduced only on the basis of a sustained consultation exercise, a White Paper and Government legislation supported by other parties? This sort of thing will not do.

Mr. Welsh: I agree. The Bill would make a fundamental change that would be stuck in the population permanently. If the change is to be implemented—I do not wish that to happen—far more consultation along the lines that the hon. Gentleman mentioned would have to take place. People have a right to be consulted, but I hope that the Bill will be killed dead today and that that will be an end to it.

Although I speak out to defend Scotland's interests, the same arguments apply throughout the United Kingdom where there is opposition to the Bill, which is designed to suit the narrow interests of a faction in the most southerly part of England. The Bill tries to defy geographical reality. The sun must rise in the east: it has no option. It travels around 12 degrees westward every hour. Allied to the low angle of the winter sun, CET will condemn all the people of Scotland, northern England and Ireland to permanent early morning darkness, with consequent problems of extra costs to industry and commerce, and substantial costs to the population.

Time zones are affected by longitude. The unchanging fact is that the UK is aligned north-north-west to south-south-east and not on a straight, north-south line. Scotland is more westerly and hence Scottish sunrises are later. CET would delay that by a further hour. The current differences with England would remain, except that they would occur one hour later. In relation to Europe, however, Scotland would be one hour worse off. If the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West has his way, only in the far north of Scandinavia would sunrise occur later than in Scotland during the winter months.

The primary beneficiaries of this European harmonisation would be people living in the extreme south of England. It is worth investigating the losers and gainers. In terms of the extra days when mornings are darker and evenings are lighter, there is a marginal benefit for London and south-east England and a massive loss for all other parts of the UK. For example, Londonderry would lose 90 extra days when sunrise is 9am or later, compared with a gain of 46 extra days when sunset is as late as 5.30. In other words, 46 longer evenings are outnumbered by 90 darker mornings.

In Glasgow, 36 longer evenings are outnumbered by 81 darker mornings; in Carlisle, 35 longer evenings are outnumbered by 72 darker mornings; in Wrexham, it is 43 to 62. London would gain 37 longer evenings, but lose 32 darker mornings, a marginal gain of only five days.

Guess who gains most from all this unnecessary and artificially induced upheaval?

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Bournemouth?

Mr. Welsh: Indeed. In Bournemouth, there is a gain of 48 longer evenings compared with a loss of 38 darker mornings. It is obvious in whose narrow interest the Bill was framed. Although there are marginal benefits in some regions, for most of us the proposal will have definite disadvantages, especially the further north and west we reside.

The Bill will create the largest time zone in the world, double the width of zones elsewhere. The present time zone of the UK and Ireland is based on GMT, which has a mean solar time near London. Hence, Edinburgh is only 14 minutes and Stornoway 30 minutes behind, but the Bill would create a time zone based on Prague, leaving London 60 minutes behind, Edinburgh 74 minutes behind and Stornoway a massive one and a half hours behind. Northern Ireland, Cornwall and Carlisle would all be similarly disadvantaged.

The effect of those changes would be to extend the hours of morning darkness over longer periods of winter and that would not be compensated for by longer hours in the late afternoon. Those early hours of extended darkness are, by definition, colder, with hazards for construction industry, postal, agricultural and other workers. The failed experiment of the late 1960s gives us fair warning about what the Bill's effects would be if the House were misguided enough to pass it. Portugal is now seeking to return to GMT after having tried out the proposal in the Bill and found, as we have, the enormous and unacceptable price to be paid.

The proponents of CET have argued that there would be a reduction in road accidents, that vulnerable people in society would feel safer and that the proposal would improve the quality of life in terms of outdoor pursuits, tourism and leisure. In particular—again, we have heard it this morning—there has been considerable emotional propaganda about children being involved in accidents.

Some very emotive statistics about road accidents have been given to support the change proposed by the Bill. Extravagant claims such as

"20,000 deaths would have been prevented if CET had been introduced in 1971"

are based on flawed statistics. They are Department of Transport hypothetical estimates that have been extrapolated from marginal results in the 1967-71 period. When politicians start to use statistics, matters become hazy, and I am afraid that there have been examples of that in the debate.

[Mr. Welsh]

There is a clear contradiction in the extra daylight road safety claims based on the 1960s figures. The daylight extra claim is that there was a

"5 per cent. fall in Scottish accidents".

However, I bring to the attention of the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West the more up-to-date Strathclyde regional council roads department report which points to

"a discernible increase in road fatalities".

The report also states:

"these years interrupted a general downward trend in road accident casualties".

We are being told that fewer accidents and more fatalities and casualties occurred during the experimental years.

It is clear that light is only one factor in explaining road accidents. For example, in Strathclyde in 1986, 62 per cent. of accidents happened on dark and wet roads compared with 40 per cent. in daylight. Were the dark and wet conditions the determining factors, or was it purely the daylight? The influence of daylight on road accidents is uncertain and small compared with that of other major factors. Major and fatal accidents have generally been falling since that experiment.

The accident statistics that have been quoted do not prove the case for CET. The figures used by the Department of Transport do not take into account other factors such as wet roads, safety improvements such as compulsory seat belts, breathalyser tests and improvements in car, road and street designs since the experiment. The Strathclyde region report shows that the combination of dark mornings and light evenings produces greater road casualties among children. That is exactly the combination proposed in the Bill, and it poses great safety hazards for children. I recommend that report to the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West.

Mr. Butterfill: Is the hon. Gentleman not aware that the analysis by the Transport Research Laboratory was based not just on the experimental period but on current information about what was happening? Is he not aware that it specifically used as one of its research areas central and southern Scotland? Does he suggest that Strathclyde council, however eminent it may be, has more experienced officials than the Transport Research Laboratory?

Mr. Welsh: Yes. It runs half of Scotland and deals daily with the practical effect of road accidents. Unfortunately, time does not allow me to give the hon. Gentleman the details of the research, but I encourage him to find them. The research proves that darker mornings combined with lighter evenings cause more accidents among children. That is an argument against the Bill.

It is claimed that an extra hour of daylight in the afternoon or evening would benefit elderly men and women who, because of crime and violence, are driven back into their houses and are too frightened to go out in the dark. The time when pensioners would benefit most from an extra hour of evening daylight is in the winter, and that is the time of year when weather conditions are most likely to keep them in their homes. Many hon. Members from outside Scotland fail to realise how dreich a Scottish afternoon can be when they talk about measures affecting sunlight. An extra hour of daylight in the evening would not remove the fear of the elderly.

I shall deal now with quality of life and tourism. Sunset would occur before the end of the working day for most of the winter. The cold would be a greater disincentive than darkness for later activity. Only half of the top 10 sports are daylight-dependent. The hon. Member for Bournemouth, West presented an image of thousands of tourists pouring northwards to enjoy the Edinburgh tattoo in broad daylight—when it cannot be seen! The experiment was tried in the late 1960s and it failed. That is why Parliament rejected it by a massive majority.

In 1992, Portugal was persuaded by the same arguments used in promoting the Bill. It changed from GMT and it found that exactly the same thing happened there as happened to us—not in theory, but in practice. Portugal had to leave its clock alone when all the other western European countries moved ahead by one hour, and it accompanied them when they switched back in September. Ever since the Government decided that Portugal would have the same time as its neighbours on the continent—for economic gain, as it was claimed—there have been more critics than supporters of the measure.

The Portuguese Government have asked for an investigation into the effects. Some early replies conclude that working people suffer from the unnatural clock time in January and December. Health research has found that people showed greater need for sleeping pills because their normal rhythms had been disrupted—a sort of minor but continued jet lag. We say "No thanks" to that in Scotland. Children were said to have greater difficulty in concentrating at school because they tended to go to sleep later when daylight continued well into the evening. There were economic and environmental costs—for example, increased electricity consumption.

A Portuguese newspaper—I shall give the House the English translation—recently referred to

"Portugal's likely return to GMT".

That is at a time when Britain is debating the possibility of changing. The Portuguese found in practice the evils that were found in this country the last time the experiment was tried out. If we do it again, the Portuguese experiment shows what would happen in practice. We have made a mistake once, and it has been repeated in Portugal. Let us not make that mistake again.

1.41 pm

Sir George Gardiner (Reigate): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) because I agreed with every word he had to say—and that is rare. The previous two speeches have made the points against the Bill with such vigour that I do not need to repeat them; therefore, this will be a brief speech.

Like many hon. Members, I think that there is a heavy air of deja vu hanging over the debate. As has been pointed out frequently today, we have been through this experiment in 1968-70, and we have heard all the arguments before. We have put them to the test and we have seen the public reaction, but here we go again. There cannot be many hon. Members who recall those debates in 1968 and 1970. I certainly have not been a Member of Parliament for that long, but I heard the debates. In those years, I was serving as a political correspondent for regional newspapers, and all my papers and all their readers were keenly interested in the experiment and how it worked out.

Like others, I have gone back to *Hansard* and reminded myself of the speech made by the late David Ennals, the then Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, when introducing the British Standard Time Bill *[Lords]*. He commended the Bill, although a free vote followed. In his speech, he mentioned the many benefits that would accrue to our commercial transactions with the continent. Not so much was made then of tourism, but we were told to expect greater convenience in travel. He told us, too, of the best expert assessment that the Bill would bring a reduction in road accidents.

When I re-read that speech, I realised what great gains we were promised in the quality of our lives and what joy it must have been to be alive on that glad evening when, rather lethargically and by a majority of 118, that Bill was passed. Most of the speeches made in that first debate were against it, but the Government and a majority of the House were prepared to listen to so-called expert outside organisations.

At the time of the debate on 2 December 1970, there was a different Home Secretary, Reggie Maudling, who kicked off the debate on whether the experiment to add a further hour of darkness in the morning should be made permanent. My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) said this morning that he thought that that experimental period had perhaps been too short. The feeling at the time was that it had gone on for far too long, and the sooner it ended, the better.

The late Reginald Maudling, in introducing that debate, took a neutral stance. He said that the pros and cons of the arguments were still pretty balanced. As has been noted by other hon. Members, he certainly treated with great reserve the road casualty figures advanced at the start of the experimental period and offered again at the end. He also referred to a surprising and sad increase in the number of child casualties between 6 pm and 7 pm—a subject that has been dealt with by previous speakers today.

The mood in the country had swung against the experiment.During the debate in December 1970, a Harris opinion poll from that morning was quoted showing that 57 per cent. of the population wished to return to the old system, 30 per cent. wished to stay with the experiment and 6 per cent. did not know. The matter was put to the vote: 81 voted in favour of making the experiment permanent, 366 voted against—a staggering majority of 285. The experiment was halted.

What was the result of halting the experiment? Was there a massive increase in road casualties? Certainly not. Was there any great diminution in business opportunities on the continent or anywhere else? No, there certainly was not. Did the tourist industry have to make cuts? No, it certainly did not—from those years it has gone on from strength to strength. Yet we are now hearing the same arguments repeated.

We hear from the Transport Research Laboratory its estimate that passing the Bill would save, I think, 110 deaths on the road and 450 serious injuries. I cannot understand how any responsible organisation can utter such precise forecasts; they must be guesstimates—it does not make sense. Do they take into account, as my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) asked, the accidents that occur on footpaths in the hours of the morning and the evening? One might go on to ask whether they take account of those who suffer heart attacks on arriving at work having coped with the dark and icy morning conditions. The best advice that we have received today from several contributors is that the road casualty argument is neutral and does not incline one way or the other.

We have also been told—again with great precision—of the extra revenue that will come to the tourist industry. We were given precise figures earlier today, although I cannot remember them. I cannot understand the basis of such guesstimates. If we allow the Bill to become law, the travel agencies will be quids in. They will certainly benefit during the winter months, when many more of the populace will decide to take a winter holiday to get away from the terrible dark mornings that they have to endure.

We have been told yet again about the disadvantages to British industry and commerce of being in a different time zone, quite apart from the fact that obviously our business and commerce must deal with different time zones right across the world. According to the recent evidence of our export performance, that does not seem to have held our businesses back in the least. Australia and, in particular, the United States have been mentioned, where commerce and industry manage to operate effectively. The United States eastern seaboard works well with the western one despite the fact that three different time zones have to be crossed. That does not seem to have held American industry back. All experience gives the lie to the claim about the disadvantages suffered.

We are part of a global economy. To be honest, if business men cannot afford to get up a little earlier to make their telephone calls from home—they all have telephones at home, paid for by their companies—they do not deserve to be in business.

I come from Reigate, and it is not up to me to express the views of those who live in the north of England or in Scotland, because their views have been eloquently expressed today. We have a duty, however, to pay great regard to the social needs of people in all parts of the United Kingdom and not, in my case, to the social convenience of my mother-in-law, who happens to live in Bournemouth.

If the Bill gets through all its stages—one has to say that it is obviously going to face formidable opposition even if it gets its Second Reading—my prediction is that public dissatisfaction will mount as it did before, and that hon. Members will come under even greater pressure again to repeal the legislation. For those reasons, I shall certainly vote against the Bill.

1.51 pm

Dr. Tony Wright (Cannock and Burntwood): I had a vision of the Prime Minister making his new year resolutions. I could just see him saying, "Send me a measure that would save lives, cut crime, conserve energy, boost business and promote health. As a bonus, could it be one that enables me to watch cricket later into the evening and, if possible, could it be cost-free?" Then, as if by magic, number one in the ballot for private Members' Bills went to the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill), who delivers such a measure.

I am afraid that the Government are in such a mood, and have been for some time, that, when they see an unpopular measure they grasp it like a drunk reaching out for his first drink of the day. When they see a potentially

[Dr. Tony Wright]

popular measure, however, they step around it as though they have seen something unpleasant in the park. It is not my job to help them, but it is rather extraordinary to observe what is going on.

For example, the Secretary of State for Scotland has been given some kind of freelance licence to subvert the Bill, whose passage would be greeted with approbation by almost every organisation representing all the interests that we have discussed today. Its rejection will be greeted with incomprehension by those very organisations.

Mr. Gallie: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Wright: I cannot give way, because other hon. Members want to speak.

We have a range of annual rituals, including losing test matches, sacking football managers, watching royal marriages break up and seeing Prime Ministers being relaunched. One of the worst is the annual, masochistic ritual in October, when, as the days close in and people start feeling it is the end of the world and take themselves to their doctors in vast numbers, we respond by changing the clocks so that the days get even darker.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: So would the hon. Gentleman.

Dr. Wright: We set off a syndrome called seasonal affective disorder by way of unhelpful response.

I do not speak for the north; I do not speak for the south. This should not be that type of debate. I speak for the middle. *[Laughter]* I speak for middle England. I speak for Staffordshire.

Three years ago, Staffordshire county council road safety and accident investigation units conducted an exhaustive analysis of road accident figures around the clock at 32 sites in the county. It found that the danger time was between 4 pm and 7 pm and said emphatically, on the basis of that research, that the end of British summer time posed a special problem and that a measure such as we are debating was sensible.

If there is informed opinion in support of change, why do we not move? Not—as some hon. Members suggested earlier—because there are physical laws that prevent our doing so. I believe that it was my good friend the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) who, conjuring up dark fears, said that the change was profoundly unnatural.

Those are absurd arguments. It is like saying that, because it must rain, we shall not invent umbrellas or occasionally use them. We take measures that make life more tolerable in relation to the elements that confront us. We can do something to ensure that the precious few hours of daylight, especially in winter, are used to our maximum advantage, not our maximum disadvantage.

The Bill does not, for me at least, concern Europe. I know that some hon. Members believe that it does, which is why they turn out on these occasions, frothing at the mouth, hearing the mention of Europe. I always enjoy the speeches of the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), appearing in fluorescent mode. I especially enjoyed her rallying call to all loyal Conservatives, which I thought was a nice intervention.

The Bill is not about the interests of business. If the convenience of business were the sole consideration, I would not be attached to the issue. I am here because I have lived through the present arrangements, witnessed what happens and considered the evidence. The evidence says that the Bill would prevent death and injury on the roads, that it would help to reclaim the streets, especially for the elderly and for women, and that it would prevent a night-time curfew for those groups of people. It would give more play, more sport, more recreation and more health. It would, incidentally, help business, boost tourism and save energy.

Mr. Butterfill: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Wright: I would rather not.

If we are confronted with such an issue, the question must be, "What, on balance, would do more to promote the quality of life of the majority of people—moving in that direction or not moving in that direction?" The evidence is overwhelming, and the House has a responsibility to consider, and respond to, it.

I have discovered during the debate that this is not the place or the moment to search for statistical illumination. We shall not make progress on that front. We nevertheless have a duty to consider the available evidence, ransack our experience, reflect the opinions and judgments of people outside the House and reach a balanced view. Knowing all that, we must concern ourselves with why such a measure has never been implemented before.

Mr. Home Robertson: It has been—20 years ago.

Dr. Wright: I am speaking about the past 20 years. The measure has always been thwarted—it has become obvious today that this is the reason—because it is always possible to assemble a collection of vested interests and special pleaders who, together, will triumph over the public interest. I take the rather old-fashioned view that it is the duty of the House to make a judgment about the public interest. I particularly want to hear what Scotland has to say. I recently had the temerity to say on television that, when the Scottish Parliament is established—I am committed to that objective—we might have to revisit the issue of Scottish representation in this place.

The following night, I happened to share a taxi with two Scottish colleagues, both of whom were generously proportioned and mildly lubricated. They asked whether I wanted to reduce the number of Scottish seats in the House and I replied, "Only in a general way." They then asked, "Who in particular do you have in mind?", and I said, "I have to get out at the next stop."

I believe that Scotland matters. Before I leave Scotland—I shall leave it all in a moment—I refer hon. Members to the best article that I have read on the subject. Writing in *Scotland on Sunday* in December, Joyce McMillan said:

"the idea that Scots gain some special advantage from GMT is preposterous; no power on earth can increase the measly amount of daylight in northern Scotland in midwinter, or save its children from making dark journeys to and from school.

But for reasons of pride, ignorance and stiff-necked daftness, we allow our public representatives, whenever this subject comes up, to prate about the 'Scottish objection' to CET in terms which strongly suggest that for special reasons—no doubt to do with the unsatisfactory terms of the Union—Scotland is the only place on earth where an hour of light can be lost in the morning without being gained in the afternoon".

Parliament has a duty to examine, assess and make a judgment about the matter. I do not think that the Bill is bad news for Scots in general, but the House must make

the final decision in that regard. Some groups of workers will be inconvenienced and adjustments will have to be made. It will be appalling news for masochists and muggers, firework freaks and couch potatoes, but it will be good news for the vast majority of people.

I think that it was my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) who said that the proponents of the Bill were making "extraordinarily extravagant claims". I do not make "extraordinarily extravagant claims" in support of the Bill. I simply reiterate the argument put by George Bernard Shaw, who said that progress does not occur through great leaps forward; it occurs through what he called "paltry instalments of betterment".

The choice before the House today is whether, by looking at the evidence and reaching a judgment on that basis, it wants to make a "paltry instalment of betterment". It will be a sad day if it decides not to. Such a decision would prove incomprehensible to people all around the country and it would show that Parliament is suffering from seasonal affective disorder to a high degree.

2.2 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): I have listened carefully to the speech of the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright). He said that he wanted to listen to Scottish voices, so I trust that he will listen to what I have to say. Although I am older than he is, like him, I have old-fashioned values—and I have probably held them for a lot longer.

Mr. Duncan Smith: That is because my hon. Friend is older.

Mr. Walker: Yes, that must be why.

The Bill is misnamed: it is called the British Time (Extra Daylight) Bill, but I would prefer it to be called the British Time (Extra Daylight, Bournemouth) Bill.

We have listened to a wide-ranging debate—I shall touch on each of the points in turn—about issues including children, road and pavement safety, road casualties, farming, forestry, the banking and financial sector, industry, tourism, aviation, landing slots, religious community problems, crime, and the postal, construction and utility workers. Something good has come from the debate—we probably all agree that the date at which we change the clocks should be harmonised throughout Europe. No one would argue about the benefits to be derived from changing the clocks on the same day.

Certain factors have not been properly understood by those who feel that, because we are a minority, the Scottish dimension should not be taken into account fully, properly and adequately. There is no doubt whatever that there are logical and sensible reasons for having time zones that are based on geographic location, latitude and longitude. The further north and west one is, the greater is the impact of the proposition in the Bill.

Neither my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) nor anyone else has addressed another critical factor—altitude. No one has mentioned the relevance of height above sea level, yet it is probably the most critical factor in temperature change. My hon. Friend said that the United Kingdom benefited from the Gulf stream. It is no secret that I have spent most of my life involved in aviation matters. My right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) understands my point because, in our younger days, we experienced the problem of carburettor icing.

It is not always remembered and understood that height produces temperature loss. Not only does Scotland have the problem of being further north and further west, but many of the communities that would be most adversely affected by the changes proposed in the Bill are high above sea level.

The impact of the Gulf stream was mentioned. Because the Gulf stream comes down the west coast of Scotland and because the Atlantic brings in much moist, warm air, Scotland has relatively high humidity. That cannot be changed, whatever we do with the clocks. It will continue to affect us every day.

It is important to remember that Scotland suffers the problems of temperature reduction that occur with altitude. In my constituency, the difference in height between Scone—which is relatively low—Glenshee and Rannoch is considerable, and there are substantial communities in higher and lower places. I could mention Drumochter pass and other glens in my constituency. Aberfeldy, Pitlochry and Dunkeld are all variously affected by altitude.

If the Bill becomes law, school buses in parts of my constituency and throughout northern Scotland will be affected by sudden sharp drops in temperature an hour or and hour and a half before dawn that frequently occur in mountainous areas. They are caused by many other factors, including wind direction and contours, and I could talk about that for hours, but I shall not bore the House with the details. If the Bill were enacted, it would be dark until about 10 am and school buses would have to operate on highland routes from about 7.45 am. In the conditions that I have described, black ice forms quickly and without warning, and anyone who thinks that gritting vehicles and snow ploughs can cover all the routes used by school buses has never been to my constituency.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): Do schools in Scotland have the ability to determine their start times?

Mr. Walker: Schools in Scotland are the same as those everywhere else. The City of London can start its day whenever it wants, as may any industry. Any school can begin its day when the local authority determines. However, we are creatures of custom in this country. We think that we all belong to the United Kingdom. We fondly believe that we should do things at the same time and in the same way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) took a bit of stick from the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood, but she was right. As humans, we react and respond to circumstances in the same way that animals do. Of course we could change everything in Scotland and be different, but we want to be part of the United Kingdom—most of us—and most of us believe in unitary activities, including Parliament making decisions affecting Scotland.

That is why so many Scottish Members are present. The majority of them have said passionately, "Listen to us. I am from the Western Isles. I want you to hear what I have to say, because I represent a remote, scattered community." Minorities are vital and important.

Scots account for less than 9 per cent. of the population. The vast majority of them live in Strathclyde, and that region's report was vital and important because it covered

[Mr. Walker]

the majority of Scots, including those in the Western Isles. We must carefully consider the claims made by the Bill's supporters, including those relating to accident statistics in relation to children and road safety. I am all for having statistics properly assessed and evaluated.

The Scottish Office realised that Parliament must be seen to acknowledge that there is such a thing as a Scottish dimension. The Scottish Office figures clearly show that the Bill does not offer the big pluses that its supporters claim. If anything, the Scottish Office said, "Be careful. Don't make a change when the extravagant claims being made cannot be substantiated."

We can all play with statistics. I love doing so, because it is great fun, but this matter is too important. My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) said that we are talking about possible deaths. He probably did not watch the television programme last Sunday in which my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West said that the 1970 vote went the way that it did—

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Did not that programme and subsequent programmes this week reinforce the fact that, the more people hear the arguments against change, the more they rally to oppose to change and the more they realise that the case for change has been based on misrepresentation and, in some cases, downright dishonest disinformation?

Mr. Walker: There is no question but that we have blown a huge hole in the credibility of the figures and statements that have been made.

I was about to say, before the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) intervened, that my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West said on television that the House voted in 1970 in the way it did because the media—you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, those nasty people up in the Gallery and elsewhere—created a huge campaign because one school bus in Scotland had an accident. If we are foolish or unwise enough not to listen to the voices of caution and enact this legislation, can one imagine what the media will do the first time a bus in Scotland goes off the road as a result of black ice? Hon. Members can imagine what would happen to their postbags. I am convinced that the measure proposed by my hon. Friend could produce such a situation quickly because of black ice and the meteorological conditions to which I have referred.

Hon. Members who have driven petrol-powered cars in mountainous areas in winter might have wondered why sometimes the vehicle stutters and gives them problems. That happens because of carburettor icing, a problem of which aviators also have experience. The meteorological conditions that produce black ice also produce hill fog, which is actually low cloud. My constituency gets hill fog all the time, and that provides the ideal conditions for a bus to skid off the road. I shall leave the subject of the meteorological conditions, because I have probably given the House enough to think about on that matter.

I wish to refer to the alleged advantages that the Bill is supposed to create for tourism. The House knows that the largest employer in my constituency is the tourist industry, and we are blessed with very long summer days. If they all turn out to be like last year's, they will be long hot summer days. Therefore, juggling with the clocks will not change the potential for tourism in summer, spring and autumn in my area. While any change will have a massive impact on other things in Scotland, I do not see that it will make a difference to tourism.

The Bill's provisions could cause problems for airlines, particularly those that fly to tourist destinations outside the UK and those bringing tourists back into the United Kingdom. Those airlines may have great difficulty in renegotiating their slots throughout Europe if the change is made.

One advantage that comes from changing the clocks on the same day, incidentally, is that it helps airlines with their schedules and helps airlines that operate package holiday tours. But there will be huge problems for the UK tourist industry if we accept the proposals in the Bill.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): I understand my hon. Friend's point about the charter airline industry, but is he aware that the industry generally, and scheduled airlines in particular, take an entirely different view? While the arguments that my hon. Friend used apply to one part of the industry, they do not apply to the other.

Mr. Walker: My hon. Friend must know that I am a chairman of the Conservative parliamentary aviation committee, and it would be astonishing if I did not know what the airlines were saying. Nothing I said suggested that the airlines supported my view. I merely drew attention to the problems of negotiating slots. If my hon. Friend does not think that airlines are constantly twisting my arm and bending my ear about slots, he does not know what is going on in the aviation industry.

Mr. Wilshire: I understand my hon. Friend's point. I hope that he will accept, however, that someone who represents Heathrow might know a little about aviation as well.

Mr. Walker: My hon. Friend makes his own point in his own way. I am happy that he should. I was merely saying that I was surprised that he should think that I do not know what the airlines are saying. It is an astonishing thing to say to a chairman of the Conservative parliamentary aviation committee. I am constantly lobbying Ministers on behalf of the British aviation industry.

Problems would be faced by local authority workers throughout Scotland, because there would be extra darkness. It is suggested, however, that that would not cause problems. The reality is that it would cause huge problems for those involved in road clearing, including those who grit our roads. It would also present massive problems for those who want to get ahead with repair work. There is no doubt that the Bill, if enacted, would present Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom with problems. It would be a measure that we would all live to regret.

Road problems can be resolved in other ways. The business, banking and other financial sectors can find answers to their problems and increase their business. It is nonsensical to pretend that all the advantages lie with the arguments of those who support the Bill. The Bill is not what is claimed of it, and we should reject it.

2.21 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I have been in my place throughout the debate. I have been convinced that the balance of argument in the House is that those who are opposing the proposed move have overwhelmingly commanded support and have marshalled fundamentally the strongest arguments. The supporters have made major assertions about the benefits that would flow from the Bill, but in almost every instance they have been unsubstantiated by facts. In other instances, the facts presented have been extremely questionable and controvertible.

It remains a simple fact of fundamental geography that the British isles are nowhere near the European central time zone. If the arguments for moving us into that zone were as overwhelming as the Bill's proponents suggest, every time zone round the world should move one hour to the east to achieve the benefits that are claimed. It is preposterous nonsense.

The hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), in a colourful speech, touched on the most fundamental point. There is a natural rhythm of life and mankind is a diurnal creature. We like light and we do not like dark. That is what the argument is about.

If we force people to get up in what is effectively the middle of the night, they will be non-alert, much more prone to make mistakes and low in productivity. We would disrupt their psychological well-being. That has been proved in Portugal. That was the evidence when we had an experiment in the 1960s, as it was in the war.

The hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) has seriously underestimated the effect of having sunset in parts of the United Kingdom at 11.30 pm or 11.45 pm in midsummer. In such circumstances, people of all ages would not go to bed at what anyone would regard as a sensible time. They would then have to get up having had an inadequate amount of sleep. Children would not concentrate, students would not study and the general state of alertness would be affected.

What I find particularly offensive in the argument about accidents is that although, of course, road accidents are important, they are not the only form of accident that can be affected by daylight or people's state of health or alertness. There is no evidence whatever about research into construction-related accidents—

Sir Peter Lloyd *rose in his place and claimed to move*, That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House divided: Ayes 93, Noes 82.

Division No. 30] **[2.24 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Richard
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Austin-Walker, John
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Bayley, Hugh
Betts, Clive
Boateng, Paul
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Burden, Richard
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Carrington, Matthew
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cox, Tom
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'lre)*
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge HT)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dykes, Hugh
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Foulkes, George
Gale, Roger
Gerrard, Neil
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Hayes, Jerry
Henderson, Doug
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Key, Robert
Khabra, Piara S
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Maxton, John
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L
Purchase, Ken
Rathbone, Tim
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ruddock, Joan
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Sedgemore, Brian
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Sims, Roger
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Timms, Stephen
Touhig, Don
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Whitney, Ray
Wicks, Malcolm
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilshire, David
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Atkinson and
Mr. Paul Flynn.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Bendall, Vivian
Body, Sir Richard
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dixon, Don
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fyfe, Maria
Gardiner, Sir George
Godman, Dr Norman A
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Hain, Peter
Hoey, Kate
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Illsley, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knox, Sir David
Liddell, Mrs Helen
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Maclennan, Robert
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Neubert, Sir Michael
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Raynsford, Nick
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Salmond, Alex
Shersby, Sir Michael
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Spearing, Nigel
Stern, Michael
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sumberg, David
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wallace, James

Wareing, Robert N	Wise, Audrey
Welsh, Andrew	
Wigley, Dafydd	**Tellers for the Noes:**
Wilkinson, John	**Mr. Phil Gallie and**
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*	**Mr. John Home Robertson.**

Whereupon MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *declared that the Question was not decided in the affirmative because it was not supported by the majority prescribed by Standing Order No. 36 (Majority for closure or for proposal of question).*

It being after half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed upon Friday next.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Following the acquittal this afternoon of Kevin and Ian Maxwell and Larry Trachtenberg on all charges, is it not right for the Attorney-General to come to the House and explain how the disastrous decision to prosecute them at enormous public expense was taken, and to take responsibility for that disastrous decision?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): That is not a matter for the occupant of the Chair.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. On a procedural motion, the House must accept the result, but the country may feel that to lose another 2,000 lives over the next 10 years—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has already made one speech today.

Remaining Private Members' Bills

DOGS (FOULING OF LAND) BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Mr. Salmond: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Given that the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) has failed to mobilise even 100 hon. Members in support of his Bill, could he not give us all a rest and defer the campaign, so that we do not have to go through this process again? His case has failed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That also is not a matter for the occupant of the Chair.

WESTERN EUROPEAN TIME BILL [*LORDS*]

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

Title of Doctor

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): I make no apology for raising on the Adjournment a matter about which, although it is of limited and, some would say, sectional interest, I first contacted the Prime Minister in 1986. At the behest of a small number of my constituents, in particular a retired medical doctor, I have tabled questions to the Minister on a number of occasions, the latest being answered by him on 14 July. At that time, I asked the Secretary of State whether he would make it his policy to provide statutory protection for the title "doctor", as used in the field of medicine and in the professions allied to it. He replied that he was satisfied that the matter was adequately covered by section 49 of the Medical Act 1983.

Like all apparently minor matters, the subject deeply engages the attention and the feelings of those who are most concerned about it. In medical professions, it involves whether a person who has obtained a doctorate, a doctoral degree in medicine, commonly referred to as an MD, is entitled to special protection of the use of the title "doctor" compared with the majority of medical practitioners who do not have such a doctoral degree.

Some people who practise regularly as doctors have no degree at all, but have a qualification that has been awarded by one of the royal medical colleges. I have had drawn to my attention the case of one practitioner whose only qualification was LSA—that is, a licentiate of the Society of Apothecaries, but was nevertheless called, and by courtesy was entitled to be called, "doctor".

In the United States and Canada, the use of the title "doctor" in medical circles is much more frequently restricted to those who have a doctoral degree, but that is because a first degree in medicine in those countries is usually at doctoral level, although many practitioners here would argue that its breadth and depth are slighter than the apparently inferior qualifications held by many practitioners in this country.

It would be interesting to know whether the Minister, in the researches that were necessary to enable him to reply to the debate, has been able to establish the proportion of doctors of medicine as defined in the Medical Act who are holders of doctoral degrees. I shall now turn to that Act.

Section 49(1) of the Act makes it an offence for

"any person who wilfully and falsely pretends to be or takes or uses the name or title of . . . doctor of medicine".

If he does so, he is liable to the penalty of a fine.

Although the wording of the Act is fairly clear, I understand from the British Medical Association that, in practice, it has proved to be virtually impossible to enforce the section within the medical professions, because it is necessary to prove the intention to mislead a member of the public. That test has proved too stringent to enable a successful prosecution to be brought.

I should like to hear the Minister's views on whether a medical practitioner is misleading the public, solely by reason of his not holding a doctoral degree, if he

accedes to the title "doctor" out of courtesy or long usage when he has no legal title to have the word used to him or to use it himself.

The courtesy title of "doctor" seems to be the nub of the problem. I understand that, apart from general practitioners, ships' doctors are particularly used to the title "doctor", although few have the degree that would entitle them to it. There may be many other examples in medical professions where courtesy has overlaid the strict application of legality.

Should we care? Should we be concerned that a practice that has grown up through centuries of usage is incorrect in law and in fact? Do not the public in general acquiesce in the fact that they are not being told the strict truth about the qualifications of the people they approach on medical matters? Should we follow the rather more strict line laid down by Dr. Johnson, a real doctor, when he argued that the antiquity of abuse is no reason for its continuance?

If—I accept that there can be two opinions on the matter—the courtesy use of the title "doctor" is an abuse, clearly the toleration of such abuse is allowing it to extend itself. It was recently announced that the General Dental Council is about to introduce regulations—it may already have done so—to enable dentists to call themselves doctors, despite the fact that many of them are surgeons and are instead entitled to the courtesy title of Mr. or Mrs., which is at least less confusing.

I understand that the reason for that departure is that dentists in other parts of the world style themselves "doctor", despite being equally unqualified in doctoral degree terms. If that is the reason for the new regulations, I regret it. I have always regarded the purpose of British culture as to export truth rather than to import falsehood. Nevertheless, the General Dental Council's decision gives added point to the debate.

I do not expect my hon. Friend the Minister to announce his conversion to one side or the other of an issue that has occupied an admittedly small number of people for a long time. Indeed, I appreciate that any decision by the Government at this stage would be greeted by howls of protest whatever that decision were to be.

I should like to ask the Minister, following this brief introduction to the subject, to tell me whether the Government believe that there is any potential for abuse in the use of courtesy titles which also have legal meanings, and whether he foresees that a possible growth in the use of that courtesy title would be an abuse that the Government would need to check.

2.44 pm

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) on securing this debate on a subject that is clearly dear to his heart—although, judging by what I see as I look around the Chamber, apparently not to many of our parliamentary colleagues. However, he has raised a number of important matters, with which I am happy to deal.

I thought I might help my hon. Friend if I were to establish a common-sense definition of the word "doctor". I resorted to a book which is never far from my desk, the "Shorter Oxford English Dictionary". It is worth looking at the number of definitions and the reasons for them. In a common-sense way, the term "doctor" applies to a number of different people and categories of people. The first definition is "Teacher, a learned man". Then come "Doctors of the church"—not just the Church of England, but the four eastern and the four western churches.

It continues:

"Holder of the highest university degree in any faculty (often honorary; used as prefix to surname)".

That is the point that my hon. Friend made. The third definition becomes more general—"a Physician". That requires no qualification, but includes those who are recognised in common sense as physicians—

"dentist or veterinary surgeon; one who carries out repairs".

The definition even refers to tree doctors, who are probably much needed in the constituency of Newbury at the moment. My hon. Friend might be interested to note that it also specifically refers not to the doctor on a ship, but to cooks on board ships or in camps who are known as doctors.

There are various other colloquialisms, with which I shall not detain the House, but I referred to that definition because my hon. Friend's remarks sought to imply that "doctor" is a title that should be reserved to those who have a certain qualification. It never has been. I will probably disappoint my hon. Friend, but I shall state none the less that the Government have no intention of reserving the title in the way that he suggests.

The House may remember the time when Paula Dixon fell ill on a flight from Hong Kong to London. No doubt the call went out, "Is there a doctor in the house?" As it happens, that cry was answered not by someone bearing the title "doctor" but by Professor Angus Wallace, a doctor, who improvised a life-saving device with a coat hanger, some plastic tubing and a bottle of mineral water, all sterilised in brandy. I was delighted to be able to write to Professor Wallace after that successful emergency operation and congratulate the learned professor on being sensible enough to put the brandy to good medicinal use after the operation by drinking it himself.

If the air hostess had asked the question that she would have been obliged to ask had my hon. Friend's wishes been entrenched in statute, the situation would have been made more difficult. Would the air hostess have had to refuse the help of anyone without a PhD? If so, it is unlikely that Paula Dixon would be alive today. What was needed was the attention of a doctor in the sense that we all recognise it, and in the sense that it is always recognised on the Annunciator in the House should one of us require the attentions of the medical profession, as happens from time to time.

The term is, of course, in general use for physicians or medical practitioners, and that is what is understood by the public. Nevertheless, my hon. Friend asked whether we were concerned about abuse. I am not concerned about the common-sense use of the word as we know it, but the House should be concerned—as my hon. Friend is—about charlatans passing themselves off as medically qualified so that they can peddle quack slimming remedies or inject collagen for cosmetic effect.

[Mr. Gerald Malone]

Anyone pretending to be a registered medical practitioner risks falling foul of the law. The central point of my argument and dispute with my hon. Friend is that his proposal would not solve the problem of abuse or people passing themselves off, which is at the core of any activity that could be described as wrong.

It is probably more likely—because there is clearly more profit in it—for someone to choose to pass himself off as a medically qualified doctor, but in some circumstances it could be equally damaging were someone to pass himself off as a doctor of philosophy, qualified in the sense that my hon. Friend suggested.

One can imagine such a person holding himself out to the public as being highly qualified and pontificating on television about how the public should behave—not that such people do so very often. Although such a person might state that he had a proper doctorate in the sense suggested by my hon. Friend, that person would not, and the public would be deceived. The damage would occur if someone were to pass himself off as either a practitioner or a doctor who had qualified as my hon. Friend suggested.

The General Medical Council has been given responsibility by Parliament to register those fit to practise medicine in this country. Only people holding a recognised medical degree will be put on the medical register. My hon. Friend asked me specifically how many people on the register held doctoral degrees, and kindly gave me notice of his question. I am afraid that, in the time available, I have been unable to discover the number, but I shall return to his question and perhaps be able to give him the number he seeks.

The penalty for abuse of the term "doctor"—in the sense of someone who passes himself off as qualified to take medical decisions—is severe. Section 49 of the Medical Act 1983 imposes a fine of £5,000 on anyone who is convicted of pretending to be a registered medical practitioner. The Act does not define the term "doctor", because it is in common usage, but it protects the use of the following titles: physician, doctor of medicine, licentiate in medicine and surgery, bachelor of medicine, surgeon, general practitioner and apothecary. The purpose of that measure is to ensure that no one can hold himself out as one of those professionals, damage the public and feel that he can get away with it.

I do not agree with my hon. Friend that there is a problem. Most members of the public do not go to the General Medical Council to confirm that the doctor is medically qualified before entering the doctor's consultation room. There are a number of other factors on which they can rely—not least the continuing relationship that most people have with their doctor and the environment in which the consultation takes place, the surgery.

If someone consults a lawyer called Dr. Smith, he is unlikely to be confused and talk about Auntie Flo's bunions instead of the making of her will. I do not think that anyone will crack on down to the surgery under the illusion that he will have an interesting philosophical chat with a doctor of philosophy on a learned topic. I can confirm that most lawyers do not go around in white coats wearing stethoscopes around their necks.

The central question posed in my hon. Friend's speech is whether the use of the title "doctor" should be regulated—and I think not. One of the reasons why I think not answers another point that my hon. Friend asked me to comment upon, about prosecutions not taking place when people abuse the title.

I tender to my hon. Friend another explanation for that lack of prosecutions—there is not very much abuse of the title, certainly not enough to justify a considerable number of prosecutions. I hope that my hon. Friend would accept that, if there were such abuses, and an attempt to mislead the public, firm legislation exists with which we could address that matter.

I do not think that we should regulate the title, because the public simply would not understand. My hon. Friend rightly anticipated that it is not a subject upon which I think the Government should embark. I would counsel him that, although we may enjoy a relatively academic debate on the subject on the Floor of the House, he might find it a bit difficult to have that serious debate in his constituency, not least with the doctors who treat all his constituents. I trust that he is using this opportunity to explore the more theoretical aspects of the question, rather than suggesting that a practical measure should be introduced to change the existing law.

My hon. Friend also referred to the General Dental Council and the changes that it has made. If he does not mind, I should like to put him absolutely right on the matter. The council has not changed regulations, or introduced new ones: it has merely amended its own ethical guidance to dentists. It is quite within its own legal powers to do that.

The amendment is relatively simple. The character of that amendment suggests the council's motives. The council has said that the change in the ethical rules

"effectively . . . allows dentists to use the courtesy title 'Doctor' in the knowledge that they will not be liable to be charged by the General Dental Council with serious professional misconduct."

The council made that change because, if a dentist called himself or herself "doctor", that was previously treated as a matter of serious professional misconduct, whether it led to serious damage to patients or not. In the case of a qualified dentist, unless the dentist describing himself or herself as a doctor went beyond the professional remit, which would be against the rules, there would be no risk to patients. I ask my hon. Friend to accept that that was the spirit in which the GDC made the change to its rules.

My hon. Friend has opened an interesting debate. I am sure that the public are not so gullible as to believe that all doctors they come across are medical ones. As long as those who are not registered with the General Medical Council do not give the impression that they are registered medical practitioners, I frankly see no problems, and no need to embark on regulation of the use of the title "doctor".

One of the Government's initiatives with which I am sure my hon. Friend agrees at heart is that we should use the House to deregulate, rather than cast around for fresh ways in which we can bring new regulations to bear. I respectfully suggest to my hon. Friend that that is the case in this instance.

I should like to end, particularly at this time of the year, by pointing out that title is not everything, which was recognised by a bard from my native country whose birthday we are about to celebrate, Rabbie Burns. In one of his poems, it is absolutely clear that titles, rank and all that are not nearly as important as either the talents or the skills that underlie an individual. I suggest to my hon. Friend that that is rather a good test for deciding whether someone is up to the professional role that he or she decides to play in life.

As Burns said:

"For a' that, an' a' that,
Our toils obscure, an' a' that,
The rank is but the guinea's stamp,
The man's the gowd for a' that."

I am sure that my hon. Friend will thoroughly agree with that sentiment, particularly at this time of the year.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 9 January 1996

ENVIRONMENT

Civil Aviation Regulations

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what input his Department had into the drafting of the Civil Aviation (Aerial Advertising) Regulations 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 2943). [7617]

Sir Paul Beresford: None.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many mobile telephones have been supplied to his Department in each of the last eight years; and in each of those years how many different suppliers were involved. [8029]

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department does not retain records relating to the supply of mobile telephones for more than four years. Details of the orders placed centrally from 1992 are as follows:

Year	*Number of mobile phones*	*Number of suppliers*
1992	47	2
1993	47	3
1994	101	3
1995	93	7

These details do not include telephones supplied in cars provided to my Department by the Government car service.

Energy Saving

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made by Government Departments towards meeting the energy saving targets given in "Climate Change: The UK Programme." [8022]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Figures for the energy efficiency performance of the Government estate are published annually. In 1993–94, the latest year for which figures are available, the standard energy cost performance indicator showed a reduction of 6 per cent. from the base year 1990–91.

Mr. Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what programmes he has introduced to increase the energy efficiency of domestic appliances; and what progress these programmes have made towards the targets set in "Climate Change: The UK Programme." [8020]

Mr. Jones: In view of the international market in domestic appliances, we have been working with our European partners under the Community's SAVE—specific actions for rigorous energy efficiency—programme on a number of initiatives. We have adopted minimum efficiency standards for central heating boilers, and energy labelling requirements for other domestic appliances. We are in the process of adopting minimum efficiency standards for refrigerators and freezers which will lead initially to energy savings of 15 per cent. for new models. Further measures under the SAVE programme are under discussion.

In the UK, we will be supporting the Energy Saving Trust in a number of projects to enhance the take-up of energy efficient appliances. We are also in consultation with consumer groups and manufacturers about cost-effective ways to bring forward and promote the take-up of appliances which are more energy efficient.

All of these measures will contribute to achieving our energy saving targets.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the current capacity of combined heat and power plant in the United Kingdom. [8019]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The current capacity of combined heat and power plant in the United Kingdom is approximately 3,400 MW on over 1,200 sites, with about another 200 MW in construction or committed.

Executive Agencies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if answers sent to hon. Members in reply to parliamentary questions by the head of executive agencies in his Department are *(a)* seen, *(b)* approved and *(c)* amended by him before they are sent; and if he will identify such letters to which amendments by him have been made in 1994–95. [7833]

Sir Paul Beresford: In 1994–95, all letters responding to parliamentary questions issued by heads of executive agencies for which this Department is responsible were seen and approved by Ministers and none were amended.

Regional Government

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about regional government in the northern region; and if he will make a statement. [8049]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have received no representations, through the Government office for the north–east, about regional government in the northern region.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about regional government in the Yorkshire and Humberside region; and if he will make a statement. [8048]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have received no representations about regional government in the Yorkshire and Humberside region.

Shire Counties Review

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress of the shire counties review by the Local Government Commission. [7935]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Local Government Commission has now completed its review of the structure of local government in the shire counties, and we are considering the recommendations in its final report which was published on 19 December.

Car Boot Sales

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what factors led to the interval between his receipt of the hon. Member's letter of 4 December about car boot sales and markets in Warwickshire and the despatch of his reply; and on what date he referred the letter to the Department of Trade and Industry. [7765]

Sir Paul Beresford: As this Department has some policy responsibilities relating to car boot sales, my hon. Friend's letter of 4 December was referred to departmental officials for advice. They copied it to officials in the Department of Trade and Industry who agreed that the issues raised were for that Department. My hon. Friend's letter was therefore transferred to DTI on 15 December.

Staff Levels, London Boroughs

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which London boroughs have not yet submitted returns on staffing levels. [7937]

Sir Paul Beresford: The annual joint staffing watch survey collects information on staffing levels in local authorities in June of each year. The following authorities have not made returns in respect of June 1995 staff numbers:

Bexley
Brent
Camden
Hackney
Hammersmith and Fulham
Haringey
Havering
Hillingdon
Southwark
Tower Hamlets.

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many full-time equivalent employees there are *(a)* in total and *(b)* per head of population in the service of each London borough. [7940]

Sir Paul Beresford: The available information is as follows. The levels of employment in individual authorities are not directly comparable because of variations in, for example, population structure and social characteristics, the extent of the use of private firms and contractors and the level of work undertaken for other authorities and public bodies on an agency basis.

	Staff at June 1995	
	Equivalents whole time	*Staff per thousand population*
City of London	3,112	598.5
Camden	[1]—	[1]—
Greenwich	9,089	42.8
Hackney	[1]—	[1]—
Hammersmith and Fulham	[1]—	[1]—
Islington	7,228	41.3
Kensington and Chelsea	3,745	24.7
Lambeth	9,983	38.3
Lewisham	8,557	35.3
Southwark	[1]—	[1]—
Tower Hamlets	[1]—	[1]—
Wandsworth	5,684	21.3
Westminster	5,698	30.0
Barking and Dagenham	5,614	36.2
Barnet	7,276	23.6
Bexley	[1]—	[1]—
Brent	[1]—	[1]—
Bromley	4,418	15.1
Croydon	7,426	22.7
Ealing	6,213	21.4
Enfield	5,997	23.1
Haringey	[1]—	[1]—
Harrow	4,703	22.4
Havering	[1]—	[1]—
Hillingdon	[1]—	[1]—
Hounslow	6,653	32.8
Kingston-upon-Thames	3,083	22.3
Merton	4,003	22.6
Newham	8,727	38.5
Redbridge	6,220	27.6
Richmond-upon-Thames	4,040	23.5
Sutton	3,712	21.4
Waltham Forest	6,959	31.4

Note:
[1] Data not available.
Source:
Joint Staffing Watch, June 1995. Figures are for staff in general services, ie excluding law and order services.

Energy Savings Trust

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the current level of funding for the Energy Savings Trust; and what is the projected funding for each year up to 2000. [8024]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Last autumn my right hon. Friend confirmed the Government's plan to provide £25 million for the Energy Saving Trust in 1996–97. He intends to provide £15 million in 1997–98 and £10 million in 1998–99, reflecting his intention that the trust should increasingly work with the market and lever in private finance. In the current financial year, the Government expect to provide £446,000 towards the trust's running costs and around £2 million via the trust to support the local energy advice centre pilot study.

These funding arrangements reflect the trust's role as a catalyst, stimulating investment in energy efficiency and the development of self-sustaining markets for energy efficient goods and services.

I understand that the trust oversaw total expenditure of £21.5 million between 1993 and 1995 and expects to expand its operations in future years.

Local Services (Funding)

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what extra funding, excluding the metropolitan railway grant, and care in the community adjustments he proposes to make available to each metropolitan district council next year, over that of the current year, in the form of revenue support grant and non-domestic rates, which will be available for each of these councils to fund local services. [7811]

Sir Paul Beresford: The table sets out the amount of revenue support grant and non-domestic rates which it is proposed each metropolitan district council will receive in 1996–97, in comparison with the amount each district received in RSG, NDR, metropolitan railway grant and community care special transitional grant in 1995–96. For 1996–97, the MRG and 1995–96 STG have been incorporated into authorities' standard spending assessments, and so will attract RSG. The 1996–97 figures do not include the additional resources available for community care, to be funded through the 1996–97 STG.

In addition to these grants, local authorities may raise revenue through the council tax and other local sources of income.

Local Authority	*1995–1996 RSG, NDR, MRG and STG £ million*	*1996–97 RSG, and NDR £ million*	*Change Percentage*	*Change Percentage*
Greater Manchester[1]				
Bolton	160.167	159.327	–0.389	–0.5
Bury	91.042	91.527	0.485	0.5
Manchester	372.765	369.848	–2,918	–0.8
Oldham	149.413	149.501	0.088	0.1
Rochdale	133.318	130.672	–2.647	–2.0
Salford	152.279	151.556	–0.723	–0.5
Stockport	130.305	128.150	–2.156	–1.7
Tameside	127.053	126.977	–0.076	–0.1
Trafford	115.707	115.757	0.050	0.0
Wigan	167.614	166.764	–0.850	–0.5
Merseyside				
Knowsley	123.928	125.232	1.304	1.1
Liverpool	375.694	384.800	9.105	2.4
St. Helens	109.194	111.534	2.341	2.1
Sefton	168.637	171.759	3.121	1.9
Wirral	202.471	209.620	7.149	3.5
South Yorkshire				
Barnsley	124.237	127.573	3.335	2.7
Doncaster	183.386	187.720	4.333	2.4
Rotherham	155.713	159.978	4.266	2.7
Sheffield	318.635	321.283	2.648	0.8
Tyne and Wear				
Gateshead	129.627	129.702	0.076	0.1
Newcastle Upon Tyne	191.110	190.940	–0.170	–0.1
North Tyneside	115.089	115.698	0.609	0.5
South Tyneside	101.544	102.876	1.331	1.3
Sunderland	193.367	195.019	1.652	0.9
West Midlands				
Birmingham	765.414	778.022	12.608	1.6
Coventry	192.253	195.367	3.114	1.6
Dudley	158.566	161.400	2.834	1.8
Sandwell	199.842	201.327	1.485	0.7
Solihul	97.332	98.577	1.245	1.3
Walsall	175.272	177.150	1.878	1.1
Wolverhampton	167.501	168.497	0.996	0.6
West Yorkshire				
Bradford	342.353	344,751	2.398	0.7
Calderdale	116.226	118.512	2.286	2.0
Kirklees	220.667	222.269	1.602	0.7
Leeds	424.628	430.867	6.239	1.5
Wakefield	180.651	182.566	1.916	1.1

[1] Greater Manchester districts have opted out of railway support in 1996–97. For these authorities, the 1995–96 figures do not include the MRG. However, it is not possible to adjust the 1995–96 figures to remove the amount of RSG which Greater Manchester authorities also received for supporting rail services. Consequently, the amount of external support for greater Manchester districts appears to fall from 1995–96 to 1996–97.

Local Authority Debt

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which are the 20 local authorities with the highest debt levels in England; and in each case what is *(a)* the total amount of debt and *(b)* the debt per head of population. [7938]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information requested is as follows:

Authority	*Total debt[1] at 31 March 1995 £ million*	*Debt at 31 March 1995 per head of population £*
Birmingham	1,287.8	1,277
Manchester	1,172.9	2,720
Lambeth	905.2	3,472
Islington	880.1	5,024
Southwark	805.8	3,522
Liverpool	798.7	1,685
Hackney	765.9	3,979
Sheffield	758.6	1,431
Leeds	688.9	951
Tower Hamlets	653.5	3,831
Haringey	557.1	2,624
Camden	543.3	2,977
Newham	542.5	2,392
Lewisham	519.7	2,144
Brent	471.2	1,927
Greenwich	468.6	2,208
Newcastle upon Tyne	442.0	1,559
Kent	429.5	278
Salford	425.4	1,844
Bradford	412.9	857

[1] Includes both short-term borrowing and long-term borrowing. All local authority borrowing is subject to general statutory controls and to the specific limits imposed by central Government on individual authorities.

EC Habitats Directive

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will make further nominations for special areas of conservation to the European Commission under the EC habitats directive. [8198]

Mr. Gummer: As indicated in my written reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) on 20 June 1995, *Official Report*, column *140–43*, a second list of candidate special areas of conservation would be sent to the European Commission once points raised in the public consultation launched on 31 March had been considered and satisfactorily resolved. That list, which consists of 75 sites, including a first tranche of 10 marine sites, was sent to the Commission on 8 January.

Further sites will be forwarded to the Commission when the remaining points raised during consultation have been fully considered. Particular attention is being given to addressing general concerns raised by consultees about the possible designation of marine sites.

The list of sites sent to the Commission is as follows:

Sites	
Asby Complex	England
Avon Gorge Woodlands	England
Bath and Bradford on Avon Bats	England
Braunton Burrows	England
Breckland	England
Bury Inlet: Saltmarsh and Estuary/Cilfach Burry: Cors heli ac Aber	Wales
Cardigan Bay/Bae Ceredigion	Wales
Carn non Tri-Tighearnan	Scotland
Clyde Valley Woods	Scotland
Coll Machair	Scotland
Conon Islands	Scotland
Cotswold Beechwoods	England
Dartmoor	England
Dornoch Firth and Morrich More	Scotland
Downton Gorge	England
Drigg Coast	England
Duddon Mosses	England
Dungeness	England
Dunkeld—Blairgowrie Lochs	Scotland
Ensor's Pool	England
Epping Forest	England
Fenn's, Whixall, Bettisfield, Wem and Cadney Mosses	England/Wales
Flamborough Head	England
Flow Country	Scotland
Foinaven	Scotland
Folkestone to Etchinghill Escarpment	England
Fontmell and Melbury Downs	England
Gower Commons/Tiroedd Comin Gwyr	Wales
Isles of Scilly Complex	England
Lleyn Peninsula and the Sarnau/Pen Llyn a'r Sarnau	Wales
Loch Etive Woods	Scotland
Loch Lomond Woods	Scotland
Loch Maree Complex	Scotland
Lower Derwent Valley	England
Lundy	England
Magilligan	Northern Ireland
Mells Valley	England
Moine Mohr	Scotland
Mole Gap to Reigate Escarpment	England
Moor House—Upper Teasdale	England
Morecambe Bay Pavements	England
Murlough	Northern Ireland
North Meadow and Clattinger Farm	England
North Norfolk Coast and Gibraltar Point Dunes	England
Orfordness—Shingle Street	England
Ouse Washes	England
Peak District Dales	England
Penhale Dunes	England
Rannoch Moor	Scotland
Rhidorroch Woods	Scotland
Rodborough Common	England
Ronas Hill—North Roe	Scotland
Roudsea Wood and Mosses	England
Roydon Common and Dersingham Bog	England
Salisbury Plain	England
Sandwich Bay	England
Sefton Coast	England
Sidmouth to West Bay	England
South Dartmoor Woods	England
South Hams	England
St. Albans Head to Durlston Head	England
Strangford Lough	Northern Ireland
Strathglass Complex	Scotland
Studland Dunes	England
The Broads	England
The Lizard	England
Thursley	England
Tintagel—Marsland—Clovelly Coast	England
Tiree Machair	Scotland
Torrs Warren—Luce Sands	England
Waveney and Little Ouse Valley Fens	England
Winterton—Horsey Dunes	England
Wormley Hoddesdonpark Woods	England
Wye Valley Woodlands/Coetiroedd Dyffryn Gwy	England/Wales
Wye Valley and Forest of Dean Bat Sites/Safloedd Ystlumod Dyffryn Gwy a Fforest Ddena	England/Wales

Burnley and Pendle Transport

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which members of Pendle council have sought a dispensation from him to vote on the sale of Burnley and Pendle Transport; and to whom he proposes to grant such a dispensation and for what reasons. [8130]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have received such applications on behalf of Councillors Ian Gilhespy and Gill Gilhespy. Both applications to vote were declined having regard to our policy of granting such dispensations only in cases where either at least half of the council or committee concerned would be otherwise disabled by pecuniary interests or where such disabilities would otherwise upset the elected party balance in the relevant council or committee. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has granted an application for Councillor John David to vote at meetings of the authority's policy committee, but not of the full council, having regard to his policy on councillor-directors of local authority-owned bus companies.

Glass Recycling

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he has taken to encourage the recycling of glass; and what new initiatives are planned. [8208]

Mr. Clappison: Last month we published "Making Waste Work", a strategy for sustainable waste management in England and Wales. A copy is in the House Library. This set out many of the initiatives we have taken to encourage recycling of a range of materials, including glass. As a result of these initiatives and others, there are now well over 17,000 bottle banks and 28 per cent. of glass containers were recycled in 1994.

For the future, the glass industry is committed to achieving a 58 per cent. recycling rate for glass containers by the year 2000. To achieve this will require increased effort by consumers and local authorities as well as industry. The Government will support this effort in a number of ways, including legislation on producer responsibility for packaging which is intended to produce higher recovery and recycling rates for all packaging materials. We intend to publish draft regulations to implement this measure as soon as possible.

London Governance

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 18 December *Official Report*, column *910*, if he will list those organisations which have acknowledged that the Government's decision to abolish the Greater London council was right. [8115]

Sir Paul Beresford: The fact that hardly anyone outside the Labour party is arguing for a return of the GLC seems amply to justify the Government's decision to abolish it.

Ministerial Travel and Accommodation Costs

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the total cost for himself and other departmental Ministers for each year since 1991–92 with an estimate for the current year, of *(a)* overseas travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers and their advisers, *(b)* car and chauffeuring costs of Ministers, *(c)* ministerial security costs and *(d)* domestic travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers. [6406]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information is not available for items *(a)* and *(d)* for 1991–92 or 1992–93. The costs for 1993–94 are £115,000 for *(a)* and £45,000 for *(d)* for 1994–95 the costs are £99,000 for *(a)* and £37,000 for *(d)*. Estimated costs for 1995–96 are £140,000 for *(a)* and £45,000 for *(d)*. All these costs include the costs of private secretaries travelling with Ministers.

The cost of chauffeur-driven cars provided for all department Ministers (item b) was £265,000 in 1991–92, £254,000 in 1992–93, £258,000 in 1993–94, £258,000 in 1994–95 and an estimated cost of £264,000 for 1995–96.

On item *(c)* concerning ministerial security costs, the information is not disclosed for security reasons.

Departmental Running Costs

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the cost of running his departmental office, and that of his predecessor, for each year since 1990–91 with an estimate for the current year, broken down into *(a)* telephone bills, *(b)* total staff costs, *(c)* press and communications, *(d)* entertainment, *(e)* alcoholic drinks, *(f)* non-alcoholic drinks, *(g)* stationery, *(h)* office refurbishment and *(i)* other. [6405]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information is not collected in the format requested but is included in the running cost expenditure of my Department which is published in the annual report. Projections for 1995–96 are in line with overall expenditure for the next year as published in the public expenditure survey statement.

Internet

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what web site his Department maintains on the Internet; what information is provided there; how often it is updated; what is the address; and if he or his Department answer questions and supply additional information through the Internet. [7567]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Department has pages on the CCTA's world wide web site known as http://www.open.gov.uk. Currently, the DOE pages include information on: the Department's responsibilities; air quality; drinking water; local government finance; the housing White Paper summary and departmental press notices. The Department's air quality information and press notices are updated on a daily basis; other information is updated periodically. Unresolved questions about authentication and confidentiality inhibit the use of the Internet for more general communications.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Renewable Electricity Generation

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the current capacity of the United Kingdom's renewable energy electricity generation plant; and what are the projected capacities for each year to 2000. [8021]

Mr. Page: The estimated total operational capacity of renewable energy based generating plant in the United Kingdom at the end of 1995 was as follows:

Category of operational renewables capacity	*MW dnc (Declared net capacity)*
Large-scale hydro mainly in Scotland and Wales	1,440
Other capacity outside NFFO[1]/SRO[2]/NI–NFFO[3]	20
Capacity within NFFO/SRO/NI–NFFO	380
Total estimated renewables-based generating capacity in the UK at the end of 1995	MW 1,840

[1] Non-fossil fuel obligation—premium market for electricity from renewables in England and Wales.
[2] Scottish renewables obligation—premium market for electricity from renewables in Scotland.
[3] Northern Ireland non-fossil fuel obligation—premium market for electricity from renewables in Northern Ireland.

In addition, an average of about a further 130 MW dnc of operational capacity is expected to come on stream in each of 1996, 1997, 1998 and 1999 from contracts already in place under existing NFFO/SRO/NI-NFFO orders and from modest growth outside NFFO/SRO arrangements.

Further orders are proposed for this year, NI-NFFO-2; for 1997, NFFO-4 and SRO-2; and for 1998, NFFO-5 and SRO-3, in line with delivering Government policy of working towards 1500 MW of new renewable-based

capacity by 2000. This would bring the aggregate renewable-based generation capacity to around 3000 MW dnc.

British Energy (Overseas Buyers)

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many (i) British and (ii) foreign companies have communicated to his Department an interest in purchasing British energy. [8015]

Mr. Lang: The Government have received no expressions of interest from any British or foreign companies in purchasing British energy.

Industrial Death and Retirement Fund

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will place in the Library the legal opinion on which the British Coal Corporation based the decision to wind up the industrial death and retirement fund. [7810]

Mr. Page: This is a matter for British Coal. I am asking the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

KONVER Funding

Mr. Dover: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, when he expects to have the results of the recent bids for KONVER funding; and if he will make a statement. [6209]

Mr. Eggar: The final text of the UK and Gibraltar KONVER II programme has now been agreed and the formal decision of the European Commission signed. Applications for grant will be invited following the first meeting of the programme monitoring committee early in 1996.

Consultants

Mr. Fisher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those *(a)* consultants, *(b)* outside organisations and *(c)* individuals employed by his Department in each year since 1990, indicating the purposes of their employment and the total payments made to them. [3966]

Mr. Lang: The information for 1994 and 1995 in respect of contacts let centrally to consultants, outside organisations and individuals employed on external consultancy is detailed in the tables below. For information on contracts let centrally to organisations employed on external consultancy in 1992 and 1993, I refer to an answer to the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) on 25 January 1994, *Official Report*, columns *211–17*. Other information can be provided only at disproportionate costs.

Lists of Contractors and Total Value of the Contracts for 1994 and 1995

Consultants, organisations and individuals awarded external consultancy contracts in 1994

Adept People
Allcock Consulting
Andersen Consulting
Associated Information and Technology
Benchmark Research Ltd.
BRC Partnership Ltd.
Broadgate Business Consultants
Business Round Table Ltd.
Butler Research
BZW Corporate Finance
Cambridge Consultants Ltd.
Capita Group Plc
Chantry Vellacott Ltd.
Child Accident Prevention Trust
Connell Wilson
Consensus Research International
Coopers and Lybrand
Cranfield Institute of Technology
CRU International
CSS International Ltd.
David Rigby Associates
David Snell
Dewe Rogerson
Dr. Paul Seabright
Ernst and Young
ESYS Ltd.
Eurostrategy Consultants Ltd.
Euro-Bid Watch
Euro-Projects Ltd.
FBI Management Consultants
First Marine International
Follow Through Project Services Ltd.
Gamma Secure Systems
G. M. Glover
Grant Thornton
HP ICM
ICE Ergonomics
International Ecotechnology Research Centre
IQA/BCS
IT World
John Walsh
JRA Aerospace Ltd.
Kermon Ltd.
KPMG Management Consulting
Landair International Ltd.
Logica UK Ltd.
March Consulting Group
Marketing Improvements Group Plc
Maunsell Group
Metra Martech Ltd.
Morgan Harris Burroughs
Morgan Stanley Ltd.
MORI
G. Shaffer
C. Langman
R. Mortiboys.
National Economic Research Associates
National Institute of Economic and Social Research
National Radiological Protection Board
National Remote Sensing Centre Ltd.
Nimtech Ltd.
Optimat Ltd.
Ovum Ltd.
PA Cambridge Economic Consultants
PA Consulting Services Ltd.
PERA International

PERATEC
Performance Consulting Group
Pin-Point Research and Business Consultancy
PMG Films Ltd.
Prime Strategy Consultants Ltd.
Professor R. M. Ridley.
Quadrilect Ltd.
Quarto Consulting International
Quo-Tec Ltd.
R. Haselden
R. S. Direct.
Recharge North East
Reynolds and Associates Ltd.
Ricardo Aerospace Ltd.
Richfords
Salford University Business Services
Sambrook Research International
Satherley Design Associates
Segal Quince Wicksteed Ltd.
Services Ltd.
Solon Consultants
SRU Ltd.
Stoy Hayward Consulting
TFPL
The Chartered Institute of Arbitrators
The Fire Protection Association
The Marketing Partnership
The Motor Industry Research Association
Theisen Ltd.
Touche Ross and Co
Unitech Ltd.
University of Birmingham
University of Middlesex
University of Nottingham
University of Portsmouth
University of Sussex
WS Atkins
Total value of these contracts is £8,901,000.

Consultants, organisations and individuals awarded external consultancy contracts in 1995
Allways International
ASRU Ltd.
Building Research Establishment
C and J Consultants
CIM Institute
Clemdale Associates
C. B. Snowdon
Coopers and Lybrand
Cray Systems
D. Tydeman
David Haynes Associates
David Rigby Associates
D. Hyde
Dr. L. B. Davies
Dr. P. Seabright
Durham Business School
Electronic Publishing Services Ltd.
ERM Economics
Ernst and Young
Europartners Consultants
Gamma Secure Systems
HSA Consultants
Inforpress Associates Ltd.
Ms J. Shawe
Ms K. Morris
KMPG Management Consulting
Logica UK Ltd.
Mach Two Ltd.
Mercers Management Consulting Ltd.
Metra Martech Ltd.
Michael Hannon Marketing
Morgan Harris Burroughs
C. Howard-Luck
National Institute of Economic and Social Research
Optimat Ltd.
PA Cambridge Economic Consultants
PA Consulting Services Ltd.
Pannell Kerr Forster
P. Champion
PMG Ltd.
Quo-Tec Ltd.
Rapra Technology Ltd.
Sambrook Research International
Schroders Investment Banking
Segal Quince Wicksteed Ltd.
Smith System Engineering Ltd.
Southampton University
Stoy Hayward Consulting
Systec Consulting
The Harris Research Centre
Theisen Securities Ltd.
Touche Ross and Co.
University of Louis Pasteur
University of Lund
University of Melbourne
University of Nottingham
Utrecht University
Warwick Manufacturing Group
York University
Total value of these contracts is £5,385,000.

The information given excludes external consultancy contracts let independently by the Department's executive agencies. I have asked agency chief executives to reply separately.

Information concerning individuals employed by this Department can be found in "Civil Service Staff in Post" summary tables. Copies of these tables have been placed in the Libraries of the Houses. Staff are employed to assist the Department to attain its aims and objectives as set out in the departmental report. Details of total costs are included in the report.

Letter from P. R. S. Hartnack to Mr. Mark Fisher, dated 20 December 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to provide you with information relating to the Patent Office as part of the reply to your question about the use of consultants, outside bodies and others since 1990.

The Patent Office made no use of external consultants in 1992–94. In 1995 two consultancies, Marketing Improvements and Coopers and Lybrand, have been engaged to help on possible contractorisation projects. The total cost to date is £108,945 plus expenses. The information for the years 1990 and 1991 can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

The Patent Office contracts out a wide range of support and ancillary services such as printing, cleaning, security, training, technical and maintenance services. Expenditure amounted to £2.5 million in 1990, £2.9 million in 1991, £3.6 million in 1992, £3.3 million in 1993, £2.6 million in 1994 and £2.4 million to date in 1995. It has also used a number of external IT experts for specialist work and Employment Agency staff for general support services as particular needs arose.

Letter from Jim Norton to Mr. Mark Fisher, dated 9 January 1996:

Consultants and outside organisations engaged and individuals employed by the radiocommunications agency:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply direct to your parliamentary question about external consultancy contracts let, and individuals employed, by the Radiocommunications Agency.

The Agency did not assume responsibility for letting its own contracts until 1994. The value, and details, of the external consultancy contracts let since then are as follows:

1994 (£320,000 ex VAT)

NERA: Economic Impact Study

MORI: Programme of Customer Surveys

Coopers & Lybrand: Review of Customer Service Branch

1995 (£292,800 ex VAT)

Y & S: Management of the Radio Spectrum and IS Strategic Partnership

C Gamblin: Planning and Monitoring Objectives

PA Consultancy: Customer Services Branch Efficiency Savings

Alkemi Ltd: Security, Threat Assessment Contingency Planning

NERA: Use of Spectrum Pricing

Etc Ltd: Strategy for Investors in People

Details in respect of calendar years 1990–1993 are covered in the President's reply to your question.

Information about employees of this Agency can be found in the Civil Service Staff in Post Summary Tables, and in the Agency's Annual Report and Accounts, copies of which are in the House Libraries. Staff are employed to assist the Agency to attain its aims and objectives as set out in the Agency's Annual Report and Accounts.

Letter from David Durham to Mr. Mark Fisher, dated 20 December 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade, the Right Hon. Ian Lang MP has asked me to reply to your question about consultants, outside organisations and individuals employed by Companies House Executive Agency, since 1990.

The information you sought is as follows:

Consultants and Outside Organisations

Please see the tables attached providing a list of Consultants (Annex A) and Outside Organisations (Annex B), who have supplied goods or services to Companies House during financial years 1994/95 and 1995/96 to date. Information for earlier years can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

The attached tables state the purpose of employment and indicate with an asterisk (*) in which year(s) payments have been made by Companies House to individual consultants and other outside suppliers for expenditure over £10,000 per annum. Amounts less than £10,000 per annum have been treated as not material to your question, and details could only be provided at disproportionate cost. Individual payments to suppliers are treated as commercial in confidence but I have provided the aggregated costs for each year.

Individual employees

Information on employees appear in the copies of the Civil Service Staff Post Summary Tables for the relevant years in the House Libraries. The purpose of individuals employed is assisting the agency to attain its Objectives and Aims as set out in Companies House Annual Reports. The total staff costs are as follows:

Year	*£000's*
1990/91	13,519
1991/92	15,570
1992/93	15,936
1993/94	15,437
1994/95	15,326
1995/6 (to date)	9,653

I trust you find this information helpful.

Annex A

£ Spend

Outside suppliers	*Consultancy provided*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Axsis Consultants	Consultants Re. Electronic Mail	—	*
CS Trident	Computer Consultants	—	*
Data Sciences UK Ltd.	Consultants—Image Based System	—	*
David Fowler Partners	Consultants Re. Car Park Repairs	*	*
Workplace Technologies Ltd.	Consultants—Image Based System	—	*
IBM	Computer Consultants	—	*
I.T. Southern	Computer Consultants	*	—
National Utility Services	Utility Consultants	*	—
		259,000	107,000

Annex B

£ spend

Outside suppliers	*Goods/Services provided*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Agfa-Gevaert Ltd.	Reprographic Goods	*	*
Anacomp Ltd.	Micrographic Supplies	*	*
Aquaplan	Roof Repairs	*	*
Arron Electrical	Building Stores, Stock	—	*
Banctec Ltd.	Remittance Processor	*	—
Barron McCann Ltd.	Computer Maintenance and Development	*	*
Barry Roofing Ltd.	Builders	*	—
Bell & Howell Ltd.	Filming Machinery/Maintenance	*	*
BPC Numeric Arts	Bar Code System Maintenance	*	*
Bridgend Office Furniture	Office Furniture	—	*
B.T. Yellow Pages	Directory Advertising	*	—
Britdoc Ltd.	D X System	—	*
B.T. Business Communications	Telecommunications	*	*
B.T. Midlands	Telecommunications	*	*
B.T. Westminster Services	Telecommunications	—	*
B.T. Glasgow	Telecommunications	*	—
British Gas	Fuel	*	—
Canon (UK) Ltd.	Photocopiers	*	—
Canon (S W)	Cameras & Office Machinery	*	*
Cardiff City Council	Refuse Collection etc.	*	—
Cardiff Lift Co.	Updating Lifts For Disabled	—	*
Caterwise	Canteen	*	*
City Electrical Factors	Electrical Stock	*	*
Clarinet Systems Ltd.	C. D. Rom Computer	—	*
Computacenter Ltd.	Various Computer Equipment	*	*
CV Carpets Ltd.	Carpets	*	—
Darley Business Forms	Special Stationery	*	*
MR-Datacom Ltd.	Micrographic Directories	*	*
Datavault Ltd.	Storage of Documents	*	*

Annex B

£ spend

Outside suppliers	*Goods/Services provided*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
David Wall	Accountancy Services	•	—
D. Brown & Son	Stationery Supplies	•	—
Ellis Tylin Ltd.	Building Maintenance Contract	•	•
Elonex Computers	Computer Supplies	•	—
Esso	Fuel	•	—
Finres	Carousels	•	•
F. J. Elvin	Building Alterations/Maintenance etc.	•	•
Forward Catering	Canteen	•	—
Gandlake Computer Services	Mainframe Software Licences	•	•
Gent Ltd.	Fire Alarm System	•	—
Gill's Travel	Foreign Travel Arrangements	•	•
Golley Slater & Partners	Design & Artwork etc.	•	•
Graphics Technology	Film for Technical Development	•	•
Gresham Computer Services.	Computer Supplies	•	—
Group 4	Cash In Transit/Security	•	—
Guardian Computer Services	Disaster Standby Services	•	•
HCS Global Ltd.	Computer Cabling/Tapes etc.	•	•
Hopewiser Ltd.	Mainframe Software Licences	•	—
IBM United Kingdom	Scanning Systems	•	•
ICL	Computer Maintenance/Equipment	•	•
International Computers	Computer Maintenance/Equipment	—	•
Interlink	Marketing Services	•	•
Intercraft Design	Furniture	•	—
Isogon Communications System	Various Computer Systems	•	•
JCW Wales Ltd.	Air Conditioning System	•	•
JVH Associates Ltd.	Vending Machine Maintenance	•	—
Kardex Systems (UK)	Public Search Swipe Cards	•	—
Kodak Ltd.	Micrographic Consumables	•	—
Lancare	Various Computer Equipment	•	—
Lamson Plc	Conveyor Belt Systems	•	—
The Lewis Group Plc	Debt collectors	•	•
London Electricity	Electricity	•	•
Makers Industrial Services	Car Park Repairs	•	•
Martin Hopkins Design	Marketing Design/Artwork	•	•
Martin Walton Design	Marketing Design/Artwork	•	—
McKenzie Hughes Computers	Computer Systems	•	—
Mediascene Ltd.	Mailing Services	•	—
Memchem Ltd.	Washroom Consumables	•	•
Mercury Communications	Telecommunications	•	•
Mercury Government Services	Telecommunications (Edinburgh)	—	•
Mertec Image Data Ltd.	Microprocessors	•	—
MR-Datagen	Maintenance Micrographic Equipment	•	•
The Microfilm Shop	Micrographic Equipment	•	•
Midland Printing Services	Statutory Forms	—	•
Mitie Cleaning	Cleaning Contract	•	•
Morgan Bruce	Legal Work	•	—
National Westminster Bank Plc	Bank Charges	•	•
National West Streamline	Bank Charges	•	•
Neopost Ltd.	Postage Costs	—	•
OTIS plc	Lift Maintenance	•	—
Park Business Forms	Stationery	•	•
Pauls Industrial Services	Asbestos Removal	•	•
Photomatrix Ltd.	Reprographic Equipment	•	•
Pinnacle Office Equipment	Office Supplies	•	—
P. Macey	Building Maintenance	•	—
Publicity Centre	Marketing	•	•
R. A. Brand and Co.	Paper	•	•
Rank Xerox	Photocopier Maintenance and copy Charges.	•	•
Rentokil Ltd.	Pest Control	•	—
Research and Marketing	Marketing Research	•	•
Robert C. Green	Building Maintenance	•	—
Richard Powell	Storage Systems	—	•
Royal Mail	Postage	•	•
Sam (UK) Ltd.	Computer Printers	•	•
SB Business Supplies	Stationery Supplies	•	•
Scottish Power	Fuel	•	—
Sealey Painting and Decorating	Painters and Decorators	•	—
Securiplan plc	London Security	•	•
Sensormatic Camera Ltd.	Security	•	—
Securicor Ltd.	Transit Of Cash/Cheques	•	•
Shorrock Guards	Cardiff Security	•	•
Siemens Nixdorf	High Speed Printers and Maintenance	•	•
Software Corporation	Computer Software	•	•
Swalec	Electricity	•	•
Speedy Office Supplies	Stationery	•	•
Starline Blinds	Window Blinds	•	—
Strand Cleaning Services	London Office Cleaning	•	•
Sutcliffe UK	Caterers	•	—
Taylor Tiles Ltd.	Fixtures and Fittings	•	—
Taymech Ltd.	CH Edin Refurbishment	—	•
Technological Solution	Computer Equipment	•	—
Technology plc	Computer Systems	•	•
Capita Managed Services	Mainframe Support Contract	•	•
Texaco	Fuel	•	—
Thompson Systems plc	Accounting Systems Maintenance	•	•
TNT Express (UK)	Courier Services	•	•
Treforest Printing	Stationery	—	•
Ultra Comp Ltd.	Software Licences	•	—
Vitec	Computer Equipment	—	•
Carlson Wagonlit	Travel Expenses	•	•
WAT Flooring Contracts	Fixtures and Fittings	•	—
Wallace Brown	Edinburgh Office Furniture	—	•
Welsh Water	Water Rates	•	•
Wilprint Group	Printing Of "The Register"	•	•
Zenith Treforest Press	Printing Stationery	•	•
Zenith Print and Packaging	Printing Stationery	—	•
		14,134,000	6,859,000

Letter from Peter Clapham to Mr. Mark Fisher, dated 12 December 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question about consultants, outside organisations, and individuals employed by the National Physical Laboratory (NPL) and the National Engineering Laboratory (NEL).

As you will be aware, NPL and NEL are no longer executive agencies of the DTI as both are now being operated by private sector management. However as the last Chief Executive of both laboratories I am pleased to respond to your question.

Each laboratory uses the services of many consultants, both for scientific purposes connected with the work programmes carried out for customers, and for management purposes. In the case of NPL, expenditure on consultants amounted to £551k in the six months to 30 September 1995, and £1,309k in the financial year 1994–95. For NEL the expenditure amounted to £84k in the seven months to 30 October 1995. A list of the main consultants is enclosed. I am afraid that data for earlier years is not easily available as a result of the recent changes of management of the laboratories.

Outside organisations are used for the supply of a wide range of services to both laboratories: these services include support services such as catering, cleaning, security guards, maintenance of buildings and equipment, office services, accountancy payroll. In addition, some scientific work is sub-contracted to outside suppliers. It is not practicable to provide a comprehensive list of the firms involved.

As to the individuals employed by the laboratories, this information is given in the Civil Service staffing statistics which are available in the Library of the House of Commons, in the DTI's Departmental Report, and in the Annual Report and Accounts issued by each laboratory.

NPL EXECUTIVE AGENCY

Main Consultants used in 1994–95
Chessington Computer Centre
Commonwish Ltd
Futurism Computing Ltd
Hagendale Ltd
Mr. K Worthy
Mr. T Cornwell
PA Consulting Group
Amethyst Systems
Assessment Services Ltd
Brameur
Beta Technology Ltd
Chart Associates
Cranfield Institute of technology
DK Research
Dr. A. Franks
Dr. D. W. Budworth
Dr. G. Shalfirstein
European Systems
Geoff Pearmine
JB Industrial Marketing
John Moore Associates Ltd
Queen Mary & Westfield College
Mr. A. Pearce
Mr. F. A. Kandil
Mr. J. D. Summerfield
Richard Andon
Sixpenny Handley Software Services

Main Consultants used in 1995–96
Commonwish Ltd
Futurism Computing Ltd
Mr. T. Cornwell
PA Consulting Group
Core Public Relations
Deltapoint Interim Management
Brameur
Beta Technology Ltd
Chart Associates
Dr. A. Franks
Dr. G. Shalfirstein
Mr. J. E. Dilly
Mr. K. Worthy
Mr. R. Evans
Mr. J. D. Summerfield
University of Sheffield
Assessment Services Ltd

NEL EXECUTIVE AGENCY

Main Consultants used in 1995–96
Ernst & Young
Heriot-Watt University
Optimat Ltd

Letter from R. D. Worswick to Mr. Mark Fisher, dated 12 December 1995:

EXTERNAL CONSULTANTS

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your parliamentary question about the employment of consultants by the Laboratory of the Government Chemist, an Executive Agency of the DTI.

From time to time we have used consultants to help review or improve internal management functions (including the provision of information technology). The significant contracts in this area have been with the following firms (the value shown is the VAT inclusive payment to those firms in the given financial year).

1990–91 £49,000
EOYS Ltd: Financial Management
BDM Ltd: Records Management
Centre for Consultancy: Customer Care Training

1991–92 £25,000
Elgar Associates: Quality Assurance Training
KPMG: Financial Information Systems Assessment

1992–93 £103,000
Elgar Associates: Quality Assurance Training
Price Waterhouse: Financial Information System Assessment
Jones Lang Wooton: Building Services Review

1993–94 £11,000
Price Waterhouse: Financial Information System Implementation

1994–95 £277,000
Coopers and Lybrand: Organisation and Structure of Service Provision
Jones Lang Wooton: Building Services Review
Hay Management Consultants: Personnel Services Review and Advice

1995–96 (first six months) £25,000
Hay Management Consultants: Personnel Services Review and Advice

I am afraid that any more comprehensive information can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. Mark Fisher, dated 20 December 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question about consultants, outside organisations and individuals employed by The Insolvency Service.

The following external consultants were engaged by The Insolvency Service in the calendar years 1994 and 1995 (to date).

Organisation	*Purpose*	*Cost including VAT £*
1994		
Price Waterhouse	User Survey	33,518
BDO Stoy Hayward	Feasibility Study (Options: Contracting-out)	72,263
BDO Stoy Hayward	Management Consultancy (Office Systems)	21,891
		total 127,672
1995		
Price Waterhouse	User Survey	91,262
Shreeveport	Contracting-out Project	488,300
Bevan Ashford	Legal Advice (Contracting-out)	26,465
		total 606,027

The Insolvency Service is an Executive Agency within the Department of Trade and Industry

Prior to 1994 contracts for consultants were let by the Department of Trade and Industry, and information in relation to 1992 and 1993 was provided in a PQ No. 146 for Ms Dianne Abbott MP Dated 25 January 1994, Columns 211–217. Information on consultancy for 1990 and 1991 can only now be provided at disproportionate cost.

The service has also used outside private sector organisations for advice on, development of and delivery in relation to specialist areas such as training, design and information technology systems;

accountancy work on individual disqualification cases; and accountancy support for the work of the Agency. Details of the organisations concerned and the payments made to them could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Finally, information in relation to individuals employed by The Insolvency Service in pursuit of its objectives under its Agency Framework Document are provided in its Annual Reports of which copies can be found in the House libraries.

Cable Television Contractors

Mr. French: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the cost of the damage done to roads and pavements as a result of the installation of television cables by contractors operating under the licence granted by his Department. [7719]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 sets the standard of work for cable operators and other undertakers, and provides that both interim and permanent reinstatements must conform to the statutory national specification. All cases of defective reinstatement which are identified by the local highway authority must be rectified at the undertaker's expense; additionally, the undertaker must for each proven defect bear the cost of the initial investigation and three further follow-up inspections. The estimated cost of repair for damage to roads and pavements is therefore a matter for the individual cable companies concerned.

Mr. French: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received about the quality of work undertaken by cable television contractors under the licence granted by his Department. [7721]

Mr. Taylor: A number of complaints have been received expressing displeasure about various aspects of cable operators' street works. During 1995, four complaints by residents in United Artists' Cheltenham and Gloucester franchise were passed to my Department.

Mr. French: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to make more rigorous the guidelines requiring cable television contractors to achieve certain standards when reinstating roads and pavements dug up to facilitate the installation of cables. [7720]

Mr. Taylor: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has overall policy responsibility for the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991, the legislation relating to street works carried out by undertakers including cable companies. He is currently reviewing the situation in the light of a public consultation carried out in the first half of 1995. The responses are now being examined in order to decide what changes, if any, are needed to existing procedures under the Act. My right hon. Friend hopes to be in a position to announce his conclusions during the first half of this year.

Internet

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what web site his Department maintains on the Internet; what information is provided there; how often it is updated; what is the address; and if he or his Department answers questions and supplies additional information through the Internet. [7575]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I can confirm that the DTI has maintained its own web server since 14 June 1995. This contains the Guide to Business, which provides an overarching structure to our presence on the web detailing the DTI organisation, key activities and contracts in relevant areas of expertise and geographic locations. Ministerial speeches and other departmental publications are also available at our web site. In addition, DTI press releases and information on the Queen's Awards to Industry are available via links to Central Office of Information and CCTA web sites respectively.

Individual management units in the Department are encouraged to place information on the server, examples of which are the report for the Multimedia Industry Advisory Group, the Buy IT campaign, Microelectronics in Business and guidance on bids for radio broadcasting licences. All information is updated as and when necessary, often against specific revision dates.

Questions and requests for further information are directed to the DTI using the auto-feedback option on the homepage of the web server. All DTI Ministers offices are now contractable by Internet email. Their addresses are:

	Minister	*Post*
tlo.lang@tlo.dti.gov.uk	Mr. Lang	President of the Board of Trade
tlo.eggar@tlo.dti.gov.uk	Mr. Eggar	Minister for Industry and Energy
tlo.fraser@tlo.dti.gov.uk	Lord Fraser of Carmyllie	Minister of State
tlo.nelson@tlo.dti.gov.uk	Mr. Nelson	Minister for Trade
tlo.oppenheim@tlo.dti.gov.uk	Mr. Oppenheim	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Company Affairs
tlo.page@tlo.dti.gov.uk	Mr. Page	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Small Business, Industry and Energy
taylor-tlo.ian@tlo.dti.gov.uk	Mr. Ian Taylor	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Science and Technology
taylor-tlo.john@tlo.dti.gov.uk	Mr. John Taylor	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Competition and Consumer Affairs

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the Ministers who have had responsibility for small firms since 1979. [7550]

Mr. Page: The following Ministers have had responsibility for small firms since 1979:

David Mitchell
John MacGregor
David Trippier
John Cope
Timothy Eggar

Eric Forth
Baroness Denton
Lord Strathclyde
Lord Ferrers.

I am the current Minister with responsibility for Small Business.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what publicity business links undertakes to bring to the attention of small and medium-sized enterprises the existence of training and development national vocational qualifications. [7585]

Mr. Page: Business links tailor their services and publicity to meet the needs of local firms. They promote training and development, including national vocational qualifications, as an essential component of a broader strategy to help small and medium-sized enterprises achieve business competitiveness.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many business mentors are currently available to small firms through business links. [7548]

Mr. Page: There are currently around 460 personal business advisers and 60 specialist advisers—export development counsellors, innovation and technology counsellors and design counsellors—employed or contracted by business links to provide independent advice and help to smaller firms with growth potential.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the initiatives which his Department has begun for small firms since 1979, stating when they *(a)* began and *(b)* ended. [7582]

Mr. Page: Initiatives introduced since 1979 with the aim of assisting small firms are outlined in the annual report, "Small Firms in Britain". Copies of the 1995 report and previous years' reports are in the Library of the House.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated regarding the relative rules for the creation and survival of small firms in (i) Scotland and (ii) England and Wales. [7549]

Mr. Page: My Department is currently undertaking, or has recently conducted, research on a range of topics which can influence the creation and survival of small firms in England and Wales. Topics covered include: why small firms' growth rates differ, management training, franchising, networking, the use of information technology by small firms.

Information on the research evaluated by my Department can be obtained from the departmental report in the Library of the House.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland can supply information on the particular situation in Scotland.

Disposable Lighters

Mr. Salmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the compliance with United Kingdom safety requirements of disposable lighters from China; what plans he has to ban their import; and if he will make a statement. [8260]

Mr. John M. Taylor: All smokers' lighters intended for supply in the UK, whatever their country of manufacture, are subject to the General Product Safety Regulations 1994, which place a general duty on suppliers of consumers products to supply safe products. In assessing the safety of lighters, account is taken of a number of factors, including relevant safety standards for the product, such as BS 6908: 1990, and the level of safety which consumers may reasonably expect. Local authority trading standards departments, which have the day-to-day responsibility for enforcement of the regulations, have the necessary powers to deal with unsafe products.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he is taking to review the safety of imported disposable lighters; and if he will make a statement. [8259]

Mr. Taylor: My Department is represented on the technical committees of the British Standards Institution and the International Standards Organisation, which are reviewing the current international standard for smokers' lighters on which BS 6908 is based. A revised standard is expected to be published shortly.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what mechanisms his Department has for monitoring incidents relating to the safety of imported items such as disposable lighters; and if he will make a statement. [8258]

Mr. Taylor: The DTI routinely collects statistics on accidents involving consumer products from a representative sample of hospital accident and emergency departments and makes use of any other relevant complementary statistics—for example, Home Office fire statistics. In addition, officials are in close touch with trading standards departments and monitor press reports to identify possible areas of concern.

Where areas of concern are identified, further information will be sought, including matters such as source of supply.

Former Soviet Union (Nuclear Installations)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what channels exist for United Kingdom companies and organisations to give advice and assistance to the former Soviet Union states in order to maintain the safety of their nuclear power installations. [7717]

Mr. Page: A number of international assistance programmes are in place to help the former Soviet Union states maintain and improve the safety of their nuclear power installations. UK companies and organisations are providing advice and assistance within the framework of the European Union's PHARE and TACIS technical assistance programmes, the nuclear safety account managed by the European bank for reconstruction and development, the World Association of Nuclear Operators and the programmes of the International Atomic Energy Agency. In addition, there is bilateral collaboration on safety between the UK nuclear industry and counterparts in the former Soviet Union.

Electrical Goods

Mr. Spellar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he will take to prevent faulty electrical goods being imported into this country. [7622]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The safety of electrical equipment on sale in the UK has been controlled, since 1975, by regulations implementing the low voltage Directive. Local authority trading standards departments, which have responsibility for enforcing these regulations, have the necessary powers to deal with unsafe products.

Dounreay (Radioactive Hotspots)

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are *(a)* the current number of radioactive hotspots identified around the Dounreay facility since the Atomic Energy Authority began its investigation, *(b)* the dates on which they were discovered and *(c)* the dates on which Atomic Energy Authority Dounreay management informed the Scottish Office of the presence of each hotspot. [7256]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 20 December 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) on 13 June 1995, *Official Report*, column *472* and the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) on 24 October 1995, *Official Report*, column *525*. Since the joint COMARE RWMAC report, which noted that 143 particles had been found on either the Dounreay foreshore, the Dounreay site or Sandside beach, was published, I understand that a further 10 particles have been found on the Dounreay foreshore. Her Majesty's industrial pollution inspectorate has been kept informed of the results of the UKAEA's investigations into radioactive particles around the Dounreay facility on a regular basis.

Spent Nuclear Fuel Storage

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the estimated time needed to build a storage facility for spent nuclear fuel. [7281]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 20 December 1995]:* This can be estimated only when a number of factors, including the volume of fuel to be stored, the requirements of the user of the store, the terms of the construction contract and the time needed to acquire the necessary planning consents and safety approvals are quantified.

Single Regeneration Scheme

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many grants representing what total sum and with what average value have been awarded under the single regeneration scheme for business start-ups in each region of Britain. [7698]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have been asked to reply.

Information in the form requested is not available.

The single regeneration budget challenge fund provides support to local partnerships for schemes which promote the wider regeneration of their chosen area. Under the first two rounds of the challenge fund, 238 schemes have included plans to assist business start-ups. Over their lifetime of up to seven years, and subject to satisfactory progress on delivery plans, these schemes stand to receive some £1.7 billion in challenge fund support towards a wide range of economic, environmental and social measures including an estimated 80,000 new business start-ups.

Following the Chancellor's Budget statement, provision of £250 million has been made for third and fourth challenge fund bidding rounds in 1997–98 and 1998–99 respectively. These will provide further opportunities for business start-up support.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Executive Agencies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Attorney-General if answers sent to hon. Members in reply to parliamentary questions by the head of executive agencies in his Department are *(a)* seen, *(b)* approved and *(c)* amended by him before they are sent; and if he will identify such letters to which amendments by him have been made in 1994–95. [7820]

The Solicitor-General: The one agency for which the Attorney-General is responsible is the Government Property Lawyers. Neither the Attorney-General nor I have seen or approved in advance or amended any letters sent by the chief executive of the agency to hon. Members in response to parliamentary questions.

TRANSPORT

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what conditions he plans to include in the sale of Railtrack concerning sale of land and buildings that *(a)* fulfil an operational or civic purpose and *(b)* could be considered to be relevant to those future roles by (i) train operators and (ii) statutory bodies. [8301]

Mr. Watts: No such conditions obtain at present and this position will not be affected by privatisation. However, the rigorous closure procedures set out in the Railways Act 1993 will continue to apply in respect of any proposal by Railtrack to close a part of its operational passenger network.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his oral statement of 18 December, *Official Report*, column 1236, if he will *(a)* place in the Library a copy of the new instructions and guidance to the franchising director relating to passenger service requirements, *(b)* set out how and with whom he will consult about the terms of the new instructions and guidance and *(c)* indicate from what date the new instructions and guidance will take effect. [8092]

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend expects to issue new instructions and guidance to the franchising director shortly. Instructions and guidance are not subject to consultation. They will come into effect as soon as they are issued. A copy will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library the passenger service specifications contained in each of the bids received for the South West Trains franchise. [8093]

Mr. Watts: A copy of the passenger service requirement for the South West Trains franchise is in the Library. The PSR is the contractually guaranteed level of service that the franchising director requires the franchise operator to provide. All competitors for the franchise bid on that basis. Stagecoach Holdings plc has stated its intention to maintain existing service levels. The franchise agreement between the franchising director and Stagecoach, which details the various contractual obligations the franchisee must meet, will be placed on the franchising director's register, which is a publicly available document. Information about unsuccessful bids is commercially confidential.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what regulations will exist in respect of the salaries, expenses and other remunerative benefits of the board and senior management of Railtrack following the flotation. [7784]

Mr. Watts: As a listed company, Railtrack Group PLC will have to comply with the requirements of the Companies Act 1985 and the Stock Exchange listing rules. On 6 September 1995, Bob Horton, Railtrack chairman, announced that Railtrack's policy is to adopt high standards in its corporate governance in the area of directors' remuneration, consistent with the Greenbury code. In his announcement, he said that share options would not be part of directors' remuneration and that a long-term incentive scheme was being developed to ensure that directors' pay reflected the performance of the company and was felt fair by the work force as a whole. Share-based participation arrangements are also being developed for the work force as a whole. Railtrack will make a full statement on directors' remuneration and these schemes in particular, prior to flotation of the company.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list, for each passenger rail franchisee, the targets for increases in passengers. [7778]

Mr. Watts: The agreements between the franchising director and the franchisees for Great Western Trains, South West Trains and LTS Rail do not include targets for increases in the number of passengers. However, each agreement contains specific commitments for improvements to passenger and station services, and the Government expect these to generate increased use of passenger and rail services.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the measures he is taking to write off the debts of Railtrack. [7781]

Mr. Watts: No decisions have yet been taken on the appropriate capital structure for Railtrack when it is privatised.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assurances he has sought from the new owners of former British Railways Board freight and parcels subsidiaries over the continued use of railways for conveyance of their traffic. [7773]

Mr. Watts: None.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of the sale value of the rolling stock leasing companies has been allocated to investment in the railway network. [7775]

Mr. Watts: The three passenger rolling stock leasing companies will compete in the open market to supply new and refurbished trains to the operating companies. Sale proceeds will not be hypothecated.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to begin selling shares in Railtrack. [7779]

Mr. Watts: We expect to float Railtrack in May 1996. More precise timing will be announced in due course.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what arrangements are currently being made by the Director of Passenger Rail Franchising to promote privileged travel for railway employees and dependants. [7770]

Mr. Watts: The franchising director will protect privileged travel arrangements for existing railway employees and their dependants in the reorganised railway. New arrangements have been made through the Association of Train Operating Companies' staff travel scheme in which British Rail and franchise operators participate. This scheme ensures that employers can continue to give special travel facilities to those currently entitled to them. It covers staff and former staff and their dependants of British Rail and its subsidiaries, including those recruited by BR up to 31 March 1996; staff and former staff and their dependants of Railtrack, including those recruited up to 31 March 1996 or the date of flotation of Railtrack, if earlier; and staff and former staff and their dependants of third party employers where concessionary staff travel arrangements with British Rail were in place prior to 11 December 1995. British Rail employees who, as a result of reorganisation, transfer to a new employer will take with them their existing contractual entitlements to staff travel facilities.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the amount of public money which has been granted to qualifying railway employees from the preparation of franchise bids in respect of *(a)* London, Tilbury and Southend Rail, *(b)* South West Trains; and *(c)* Great Western. [7774]

Mr. Watts: This is a matter for the British Railways Board.

Financial assistance, up to a maximum of £100,000, is available from BR to qualifying management employee buy-out teams towards their costs in preparation for pre-qualification, and for professional advice in mounting a bid if they qualify.

Assistance is repayable if the bid succeeds.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those types of railcard which have not been guaranteed by the Railways Act 1993. [7787]

Mr. Watts: Franchise operators will be required to offer young persons, senior and disabled persons railcards. Voluntary schemes administered by the Association of Train Operating Companies have been prepared to allow

the continuation of the family railcard, network card, and the HM forces railcard. All train-operating companies—including those for which franchise agreements have been signed—are members of these schemes.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of Railtrack's 10-year investment plan will be funded from *(a)* the company's own resources, *(b)* grants from public funds, *(c)* asset disposal and *(d)* the private finance initiative or other sources of private money. [7776]

Mr. Watts: I refer to my answer of today to the hon. Member for Newham, South, (Mr. Spearing).

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the total cost to public funds so far in this financial year for *(a)* consultants and *(b)* other advisers for the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising. [7777]

Mr. Watts: The total cost to public funds of consultants and advisers in 1995–96—to end of December 1995—is £21.5 million.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if rail operators are required to consider the environmental impact of increased journeys by car resulting from *(a)* reductions in rail services and *(b)* closure of rail lines. [8131]

Mr. Watts: Until passenger services are franchised, service levels are a commercial matter for British Rail. After franchising, core passenger service levels are guaranteed contractually through passenger service requirements. The closure of lines is subject to rigorous statutory closure procedures.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what arrangements he is making for compliance with EC directive No. 91/440 (EEC) following the privatisation of Railtrack. [7786]

Mr. Watts: Railtrack, as infrastructure manager, will have to comply with the directive as implemented in this country by the Railways Regulations 1992 and the Railways (Amendment) Regulations 1994.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of Railtrack shares he expects to sell when the company is privatised. [7780]

Mr. Watts: We expect to offer at least 51 per cent. of the equity of Railtrack. No further decision on the precise figure has been taken.

The UK public offer is expected to represent not less than 30 per cent. of the shares available in the offer, with the possibility of this amount being increased in the event of strong retail demand.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to have transferred 51 per cent. of passenger rail franchises to the private sector. [7771]

Mr. Watts: Franchises representing some 50 per cent. of services in terms of passenger revenue have either been awarded or put out to tender to the private sector. The franchising director continues to make good progress towards his principal objective of franchising passenger rail services as soon as is reasonably practicable.

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all research and consultancy contracts let by his Department concerning the privatisation of the railways over the threshold of £150,000, the dates of the relevant invitation advertisements in the *European Journal* and the dates of the contract award announcements. [7347]

Mr. Watts: The information for contracts let by my Department, currently valued at more than £150,000 excluding VAT, is listed in the table.

The process for announcing contract awards has varied so the table includes the date for the start of each contract.

Consultant	*Type*	*Date of invitation notice*	*Start of contract*
Samuel Montagu	Merchant Banking	n/a	November 1988
Coopers and Lybrand	Access charges	n/a	December 1991
Linklaters and Paines	Legal advice	n/a	August 1992
KPMG Peat Marwick	Accountancy and Taxation	n/a	August 1992
Mercer Management	Restructuring options for freight	n/a	September 1992
Richard Ellis	Property advisers	n/a	February 1993
Ernst and Young	Information systems	n/a	June 1993
Dewe Rogerson Ltd.	Marketing	n/a	June 1993
Hambros Bank Ltd.	Merchant Banking	14 July 1994 OJEC Ref: 94/S 133–PA47046/EN	August 1994
Ernst and Young	Corporate finance advice on BRIS contract pricing	n/a	September 1994
Travers Morgan	Specialist advice on BRIS contract pricing	n/a	September 1994
Freshfields Price Waterhouse	Legal Advice Accountancy	n/a 10 August 1994 OJEC Ref: 94/S 152–PA53120/EN	October 1994 December 1994
SBC Warburg	Merchant Banking	10 August 1994 OJEC Ref: 94/S 152–PA53120/EN	December 1994
Ernst and Young	Accountancy	10 August 1994 OJEC Ref: 94/S 152–PA53120/EN	January 1995
Linklaters and Paines	Legal advice	n/a	December 1994
Mercer Management	Freightliner access charges	n/a	February 1995

Consultant	Type	Date of invitation notice	Start of contract
Richard Ellis	Property advisers	10 August 1994 OJEC Ref: 94/S 152–PA53120/EN	March 1995
Touche Ross	Reporting Accountants	10 August 1994 OJEC Ref: 94/S 152–PA53120/EN	March 1995
Solid Solutions Associates	Retail Offer Adviser	n/a	June 1995
Shearman and Sterling	US Lawyers	n/a	July 1995
Dewe Rogerson Ltd.	Marketing	10 August 1994 OJEC Ref: 94/S 152–PA53120/EN	August 1995
Royal Bank of Scotland	Receiving Bank	n/a	August 1995
Royal Mail	Postal services	n/a	October 1995
Royal Bank of Scotland	Custodian Bank	n/a	November 1995
Mercer Management /NERA	Options for Railfreight Distribution	10 August 1994 OJEC Ref: 94/S 152–PA53120/EN	December 1995
Bowne International	Printing and Publishing Services	8 August 1995 OJEC Ref: 95/S 149–PA79013/EN	December 1995
HP:ICM	International Road Show	7 November 1995 OJEC Ref: 95/S 212 PA116782/EN	January 1996

n/a - not applicable.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current timetable for *(a)* fundraising each passenger service, *(b)* selling each BR-owned freight business, *(c)* selling each BR-owned infrastructure company, *(d)* selling each of the other BR businesses and *(e)* selling Railtrack, indicating the date that bids were or will be invited and the date on which the Government expect that the franchise or business will be sold in each case. [6182]

Mr. Watts: To date, 27 businesses have been sold. These are listed at table A. In addition, the two remaining rolling stock leasing companies have been sold subject to contract; sales will be completed within the next few weeks.

The timetable for franchising and future sales is set down in list A. This gives indications only of when sales are expected to be completed or franchises awarded. More precise dates could prejudice negotiations.

Table A

	Sale/Sold	Month
Freight		
Red Star	Sold	5 September 1995
Rail express systems Ltd.	Sold	9 December 1995
OTHER BUSINESSES		
Special Trains Unit	Sale completed	31 March 1995
BRIS Design Offices		
DCU Birmingham	Sold	25 July 1995
Mainline Swindon	Sold	18 August 1995
IDG Glasgow	Sold	18 August 1995
BPE Mechanical and Engineering Consultancy, Doncaster	Sold	15 September 1995
Civil Engineering Design Group, York	Sold	15 September 1995
Powertrack Engineering Company Ltd.	Sold	15 December 1995
CEDAC London Ltd	Sold	15 December 1995
BR Maintenance Ltd.		
Swindon Electronic Service Centre	Sold	11 April 1995
Chart Leacon (Ashford), Ilford, and Doncaster Depots	Sold	5 June 1995
Wolverton, and Springburn (Glasgow) Depots	Sold	6 June 1995
Eastleigh Depot	Sold	7 June 1995
BR Telecommunications Ltd.	Sale completed	21 December 1995
BR Central Services		
Meldon Quarry Ltd.	Sold	February 1994
Baileyfield Switches and Crossings Works	Sold	7 July 1995
Ditton Timber Treatment Works	Sold	1 September 1995
Quality and Safety Services Ltd.	Sold	10 November 1995
Occupational Health Services Ltd.	Sold	30 November 1995
Signalling Control (UK) Ltd.	Sold	1 December 1995
Interlogic Control Engineering Ltd.	Sold	4 January 1996
OBS Services Ltd.	Sold	3 October 1995
Rolling stock leasing companies		
Porterbrook Leasing Ltd.	Sale Completed	8 January 1995
Sold subject to contract		
Angel Train Contracts Ltd.		
Eversholt Leasing Ltd.		

List A

(a) *Franchises*

The Franchising Director is responsible for awarding franchising contracts.

The Franchising Director awarded the franchise for South West Trains on 19 December and the franchises for Great Western and LTS Rail on 20 December.

Final bids will be invited, and the award of the franchises will be made, as soon as practicable for InterCity East Coast, Midland Main Line, Network SouthCentral and Gatwick Express.

Invitations to tender for South Eastern were issued on 19 December. The franchise will be awarded as soon as practicable.

Invitations to tender for the remaining franchises will be made thereafter.

(b) *Freight Businesses*

Final bids for BR's three Trainload Freight companies were invited on 29 September 1995. Sales are likely early in 1996.

Final bids for Freightliner were invited on 22 December 1995. Sale is anticipated in Spring 1996.

Railfreight Distribution will be offered for sale as soon as practicable.

(c) *Infrastructure companies*

Final bids for the following 13 businesses were invited on 5 October 1995 and the sales are expected in the coming months:

Central Infrastructure Maintenance Company Limited

Central Track Renewals Company Limited

Scotland Infrastructure Maintenance Company Limited

Scotland Track Renewals Company Limited

Western Infrastructure Maintenance Company Limited

Western Track Renewals Company Limited

Northern Infrastructure Maintenance Company Limited

Northern Track Renewals Company Limited

Eastern Infrastructure Maintenance Company Limited

Eastern Track Renewals Company Limited

Southern Track Renewals Company Limited

South West Infrastructure Maintenance Company Limited

South East Infrastructure Maintenance Company Limited

(d) Other BR Businesses

Final bids for the following businesses were invited:

Castleton Long Welded Rail Works 1 May 1995

Rail Projects Limited 23 June 1995

The engineering link 15 December 1995

Interfleet Technology 15 December 1995

Network Train Engineering Services 15 December 1995

All the above are expected to be sold over the next few months.

Final bids for the College of Railway Technology were invited on 19 January 1996.

BR plans to dispose of about 10 other central services in due course.

(e) *Railtrack*

The Government intend to sell Railtrack by stock market flotation in May 1996.

Vehicles Inspectorate

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people have been employed in the Vehicle Inspectorate on *(a)* operational and *(b)* management duties in each of the last five years. [8112]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Vehicle Inspectorate to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ron Oliver to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 9 January 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the number of people employed in the Vehicle Inspectorate (VI) on operational and management duties in each of the last 5 years.

The figures below show the total number of staff employed over the last 5 years.

Year	*Number of Staff*
1990–91	1,653
1991–92	1,879
1992–93	1,861
1993–94	1,768
1994–95	1,649

Note:

Staffing expressed in whole time equivalents averaged over the year

It is difficult to define whether staff are involved with operational or management duties and such information could only be provided at disproportionate cost. However, the attached table provides a breakdown of the senior management structure within the Inspectorate over the last 9 years.

Source:

VI Annual Reports.

VI senior management

	1987	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Chief Executive/Head	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Other G5	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
G6 Director	8	8	9	6	5	3	3	2	2
Total Executive Directors	9	9	10	8	7	5	5	4	4
Other G6	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	2	1
Total G6 and above	9	9	10	8	7	6	6	6	5

Source:

Annual Reports, number of Directors. Position at 31 March.

Newbury Bypass

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what figures for traffic induced by the Newbury bypass have been presented to the public in Newbury; and what opportunity there has been for the public to comment on the implications; [8063]

(2) what are the traffic figures for the inner relief road in Newbury with a western bypass under current road traffic forecasts for the years 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015; [8064]

(3) if the traffic model used in the 1995 Newbury bypass study report by the Highways Agency was the same as that used for the public inquiry of 1988; [8068]

(4) what percentage increase was assumed by the Highways Agency in the traffic model for the A34 Newbury bypass in the total number of trips between 1983 and 1995; if this percentage increase was applied equally to all traffic; and what was the total number of trips in the model for 1995; [8047]

(5) if the figure for traffic quoted in the Highways Agency's Newbury bypass study report for the A34 inner relief road takes into account the suppression of traffic demand through congestion; [8066]

(6) what is the capacity of the A34 inner relief road in Newbury; [8065]

(7) what considerations led him not to carry out a traffic survey data for the Highways Agency study report of the Newbury bypass in 1995. [8067]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Cynog Dafis, dated 9 January 1996:

As you know, John Watts has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Questions about the A34 Newbury Bypass.

The Highways Agency Study last year estimated that induced traffic could increase traffic on the Bypass by 10%. The Study Report has been made freely available to both public bodies and the general public since it's publication last July.

The forecast traffic flows on the A334 Inner Relief Road in Newbury with and without the proposed bypass are shown in the table below. The bypass provides relief by allowing longer distance through traffic to avoid the town, local traffic would continue to use the existing A34. The flows given in the table assuming the bypass is completed should be treated as indicative. In practice they will depend on what local traffic management measures are developed to maximise the benefits brought by the bypass. This will be particularly important for the longer term, where flows will be heavily dependent on how traffic is managed in Newbury as a whole. For this reason the table does not attempt to forecast flows beyond 2010.

	Without bypass		*With bypass*	
Year	*Low growth*	*High growth*	*Low growth*	*High growth*
2000	57,000	63,000	35,000	39,000
2005	61,000	70,000	38,000	43,000
2010	65,000	78,000	40,000	48,000

The flows given are Annual Average Daily Traffic for low and high growth.

The traffic model used to assess the scheme at the 1988 public inquiry was updated to a 1990 base using observed growth in Newbury. The updating of the model was undertaken on a disaggregate basis such that individual zone to zone movements were growthed up separately. The total number of trips in the model for 1983 and 1990 are approximately 100,000 and 142,300 respectively, which equates to overall growth of 42%.

Since the model was rebased to 1990 no further major updating has been undertaken. Model forecasts for 1995 have not therefore been produced.

The traffic appraisal work reported in the 1995 Newbury Bypass Study Report was largely based on the traffic model prepared for the 1988 public inquiry and subsequently updated for the 1992 inquiry. Additional information on existing flows was obtained from measured traffic counts undertaken on the A34 in 1994.

The traffic flows forecasts quoted in the Study Report for the A34 Inner Relief Road do not make any specific allowance for suppression of demand due to congestion.

However, a number of separate economic sensitivity tests were undertaken which restricted traffic growth within Newbury, including the existing A34, to reflect the effects of congestion suppressing demand. These tests indicate that the scheme continues to be good value for money.

Existing Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) flows on the A34 Inner Relief Road in Newbury are approximately 50,000 vehicles per day. This flow level results in significant congestion during weekday peaks and at times during summer weekends. Within these periods the road operates close to its maximum capacity. Conditions for long distance through traffic are generally very poor and intolerable at times. More local traffic within Newbury also suffers significantly because of congestion. The overall level of service is very low.

The ultimate carrying capacity of an urban road over a whole day depends on many factors including the urban nature of the road, the proportion of heavy vehicles, the effects of junctions and their capacities, the interaction of local and longer distance through traffic, the variation in traffic flows throughout the day and how traffic demand spreads from peak to off peak periods.

Capacity also depends on the interaction of these factors which is complex. It is therefore very difficult to state a precise daily flow which represents the maximum flow the A34 could carry. In theory there is some scope for traffic flow to increase above existing levels outside the peak periods. But in practice for this to happen would require a significant change in driver behaviour to travel in the relatively less busy parts of the day.

During the review of the Newbury bypass, the Highways Agency used information from the traffic model developed for the 1988 and 1992 public inquiries into the scheme, supplemented with traffic count data collected during 1994.

In addition a number of induced traffic appraisals were undertaken based on a range of assumptions which confirmed that the scheme represents good value for money, even under the most onerous assessment conditions.

In the circumstances, the Agency considered that the traffic information available for the scheme was sufficiently detailed and robust with no fundamental change to traffic patterns other than increasing congestion, to carry out the review without the need for extensive new data collection.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy in respect of a package bid for Newbury *(a)* with or *(b)* without a western bypass. [8062]

Mr. Watts: We have yet to receive the royal county of Berkshire's formal 1996–97 transport policies and programme package bid for Newbury, and until we have received and considered it, we cannot comment. However, I understand that the county is looking to implement a local transport strategy that would be complementary to the Newbury bypass.

Ormskirk Bypass

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he plans to begin the construction of the A570 Ormskirk bypass. [7934]

Mr. Watts: The A570 Ormskirk bypass scheme remains in the main programme. I hope to announce a preferred route shortly. Further development work will be taken forward when resources become available.

Microwave Landing System

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to promote the planning and installation of microwave landing systems. [7936]

Mr. Norris: The Civil Aviation Authority is responsible for the planning and installation of air traffic control infrastructure. I understand, that the National Air Traffic Services has a well-established research and development programme for microwave landing systems, which has involved the use of fixed and mobile prototype MLS equipment. By April 1996, this should have led to the installation of a fully operational category III—the worst weather conditions—MLS at Heathrow airport.

Metropolitan Railway Grant

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for the payment of metropolitan railway grant in 1996–97; and if he will make a statement. [7933]

Mr. Watts: I have no plans for payment of metropolitan railway grant in 1996–97. The current standard spending assessment "bolt on" and MRG will be combined, from 1996–97 onwards, to provide an enhanced SSA "bolt on" for local rail services supported by English passenger transport executives, with the exception of local rail services supported by Greater Manchester PTE in 1995–96. Funding for those services will, from 1996–97, be provided by the franchising director.

Robin Hood Line

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what financial support has already been made available for stages 2 and 3 of the Robin Hood line, Nottinghamshire; and if he will make a statement about future funding. [8152]

Mr. Norris: I announced yesterday that the Government are to make a further £3.1 million available for stage 2, in addition to the £6.5 million already contributed, to meet cost increases and provide for the construction of Kirkby in Ashfield station. We are willing in principle to provide funds for stage 3, subject to the normal criteria for funding of local transport schemes, including value for money. Any funding by my Department for stage 3 would take into account the resources being provided from regional challenge funds.

Rainwerth Bypass

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has received about the benefits in transport and economic terms of the Rainwerth bypass, Nottinghamshire; when finance will be available for its construction; on what date he expects completion; and if he will make a statement. [8151]

Mr. Norris: Nottinghamshire county council set out in some detail in its transport policies and programme submission for 1996–97 the case for building the Rainwerth bypass. Its submission shows that the council estimates the benefit-to-cost ratio of the scheme to be about 4:1.

This was one of many worthwhile projects that we were unable to fund in the 1996–97 local transport settlement, announced last month. Nottinghamshire will have the opportunity to bid again for resources for the bypass in the 1996 TPP round. I cannot, of course, give any indication at this stage of whether such a bid would be successful.

Capital Expenditure (Nottinghamshire)

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms the allocation of capital expenditure on local roads and transport in Nottinghamshire in (i) 1995–96 and (ii) 1996–97. [8155]

Mr. Norris: Nottinghamshire's allocations were as follows:

£ million

	1995–96	*1996–97*
Grant	4.682	2.685
Borrowing approval	8.433	6.168
Gross approved spending	13.115	9.203

A large part of the reduction in provision between the two years is accounted for by the reduction in expenditure on a number of major schemes which are coming to an end. The gross approved spending figure for 1996–97 includes £0.15 million of grant unused by the council in earlier years. Figures are available only in cash terms.

Rail Fares

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those types of rail fare which have not been subject to control by the rail regulator. [7785]

Mr. Watts: The franchising director regulates key commuter and leisure fares all saver tickets, unrestricted standard return tickets where there are no saver tickets, and all standard weekly season tickets. In London, Edinburgh and Cardiff, where there is significant commuting by rail, all the key commuter fares—standard season tickets, standard singles and unrestricted standard returns—will be regulated. Operators have freedom to apply commercial judgment to setting a range of other fares including all first class fares, standard returns for longer distances, super savers, APEX and cheap day returns.

Road and Rail Freight

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of freight in the United Kingdom was carried by *(a)* road and *(b)* rail in each of the last 10 years. [8108]

Mr. Watts: Details of freight carried in the United Kingdom in each of the last 10 years are as follows:

Freight transport in the United Kingdom: by mode 1985–1994

	Road as percentage of all freight	*Rail as percentage of all freight*	*All modes billion tonne kms*
Goods moved			
1985	56	8	189
1986	57	9	189
1987	58	9	198
1988	60	8	221
1989	62	8	225
1990	62	7	221
1991	61	7	217
1992	61	7	210
1993	64	7	214
1994'	66	6	224
Goods lifted			
1985	81	7	1,844
1986	81	7	1,871
1987	81	7	1,939
1988	82	7	2,201
1989	82	7	2,245
1990	81	6	2,203
1991	81	7	2,026

Freight transport in the United Kingdom: by mode 1985–1994

	Road as percentage of all freight	*Rail as percentage of all freight*	*All modes billion tonne kms*
1992	81	6	1,963
1993	82	5	2,028
1994[1]	83	5	2,095

Note:
[1] Provisional.
Sources:
Department of Transport, Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland.

Buses

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to encourage operators to introduce buses with modern technology minimising polluting emissions. [8106]

Mr. Norris: Polluting emissions from buses are already beginning to reduce and are forecast to continue to reduce until at least 2005 on the basis of current rates of vehicle replacement as a result of increasingly stringent emissions standards for new vehicles. I am satisfied, in that context, that it should be a matter for operators to decide when to buy new vehicles.

Buses and Coaches

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* buses and *(b)* coaches operating on British roads are more than (i) 30, (ii) 20 and (iii) 10 years old. [8105]

Mr. Norris: The records held by DVLA show that, at the end of 1994, the number of licensed public service vehicles in the bus taxation class were as follows, by year of first registration:

(i) 30 years old or more, 309

(ii) 20 years old or more, 2,807

(iii) 10 years old or more, 34,203.

The split between bus body type and coach body type is not readily available.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to reduce pollution caused by buses and coaches through *(a)* obsolete technology and *(b)* poor maintenance. [8107]

Mr. Norris: The Government are committed to cracking down on unnecessary pollution from vehicles. Emissions standards for vehicles in service, including buses and coaches, were tightened in September 1995. Buses and coaches found to exceed the prescribed emissions standards at annual tests will fail the test. In addition, compliance with emission standards is enforced both at the roadside and in operators' premises by vehicles examiners who issue prohibition notices to any vehicle exceeding the limit preventing its being used.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of *(a)* buses and *(b)* coaches currently operating on British roads have failed to reach required acceptable levels of exhaust emissions. [8116]

Mr. Norris: The information is not available in the form requested.

Rail Freight

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to encourage freight haulage by rail. [8104]

Mr. Watts: Rail must improve its performance if it is to attract new traffic and retain existing freight customers. The key to this is liberalisation and privatisation. We have already opened up the rail network to competition. Privatisation of British Rail's freight businesses is well advanced.

Some 145 rail freight grants have been awarded since 1979, with a total value of £100 million at today's prices, securing traffic to rail equivalent to over 2.5 million lorry journeys per year.

Public Transport (Grants)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration he has given to providing specific grants to maintaining a public transport service where the positive environmental impact of that service cannot be readily measured in terms of financial costs or prices; and if he will make a statement. [8109]

Mr. Norris: Those directly responsible for providing public transport services are best placed to take into account environmental and other impacts in considering the funding of particular services, in the light of the resources available to them, including Government grant. I have no plans to establish a specific grant for this purpose.

Road Repairs (Winchelsea)

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what will be the cost of the repairs to the A259, including bridge strengthening, around Winchelsea; and how long they will take. [7797]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mrs. Jacqui Lait, dated 9 January 1996:

The Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr John Watts, has asked me to write to you in reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the cost and timing of road repairs and bridge strengthening on the A259 near Winchelsea.

The future roads and bridge maintenance programme generally is being reviewed in the light of the recent budget announcement. Pending the completion of this process, I regret that I am not in a position to say what the cost and timing of future road repairs and bridge strengthening on the A259 in the Winchelsea area will be.

I am sorry I cannot be more forthcoming at the moment.

Noise Insulation

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the minimum night time noise specified in order to qualify a householder for noise insulation grant; what changes he plans; and if he will make a statement. [7995]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. William O'Brien, dated 9 January 1996:

The Minister of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your question about what is the minimum night-time noise specified in order to qualify a householder for noise insulation grant; what changes he plans; and if he will make a statement.

There is no specified minimum night-time noise level to qualify a householder for noise insulating grant with respect to new or improved roads. There are no plans to change this at the present time.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the specified minimum noise level from motorway traffic qualifying householders for noise insulation; what plans he has to reduce it; and if he will make a statement. [7992]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. William O'Brien, dated 9 January 1996:

The Minister of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about what is the specified minimum noise level from motorway traffic qualifying householders for noise insulation; what plans he has to reduce it; and if he will make a statement.

The minimum noise level requirements from motorway traffic qualifying householders for noise insulation are set out in the Noise Insulation Regulations (1975 to 1988) under which an offer of secondary glazing for eligible rooms of dwellings is made where it is estimated that maximum noise levels during the 15 years after road opening will be at least 68dBA on the L10 18 hour scale with a contribution of at least 1dBA from traffic using the new or improved road.

There are no plans to change this at the present time.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last received a report from the working party set up to review the 1978 noise insulation regulations; and if he will make a statement. [7993]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. William O'Brien, dated 9 January 1996:

The Minister of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about when he last received a report from the working party set up to review the 1978 Noise Insulation Regulations; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State last received a report from the working party set up in 1978 to review the 1975 Noise Insulation Regulations in 1983. Many of the recommendations were implemented in the 1988 amendment to the Noise Insulation Regulations.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Williams Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many mobile telephones have been supplied to his Department in each of the last eight years; and in each of those years how many different suppliers were involved. [8037]

Mr. Norris: The numbers of mobile telephones purchased by the Department and the suppliers used in each of the last eight years were as follows:

Year	*BT*	*Vodafone*	*Martin Dawes*	*New Gate Coms*	*Securicor*	*Intercell*	*Talk Land*	*Uniqeair*	*Uplands Radio*	*Total*
1988	4	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	5
1989	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	4
1990	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
1991	4	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	8
1992	32	26	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	59
1993	54	65	4	1	1	—	—	—	—	125
1994	46	71	24	—	—	1	2	—	—	144
1995	78	104	510	—	10	—	—	6	1	709

Travel Planning

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to introduce a nationwide information system to assist the public in travel planning. [8264]

Mr. Norris: Transport operators are better placed than Government to provide travel information. A number of nationwide travel planning systems are being developed, including the Great Britain bus timetable prepared by Southern Vectis, to which the Department of Transport contributed funds; the telephone hotline also run by Southern Vectis; and the national train information system planned by the British Railways Board as part of the BR/Railtrack informed traveller project.

Midland Main Line

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much has been invested on rolling stock and motive power on the Midland Main Line in each of the last five years. [7354]

Mr. Watts: As Midland Main Line has existed as a discrete organisation only since 1 April 1994 the information is not available in the form requested. However, over the last five years, around £6 billion has been invested in the railway industry of which around £1.26 billion has been spent on new and improved passenger rolling stock.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how much has been invested on track maintenance on the Midland Main Line between London and Nottingham in each of the last five years; [7353]

(2) how much has been invested on signal maintenance on the Midland Main Line between London and Nottingham for each of the last five years. [7354]

Mr. Watts: The information requested, in respect of each of the last three years, is in the table.

£ million

	Track maintenance/renewals	Signal maintenance/renewals
1993–94	14 million	2.7 million
1994–95	16 million	3.1 million
1995–96	15.7 million	2.4 million

Comparable figures are not available before 1993–94, when Railtrack was formed as a separate division of the British Railways Board.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many occasions, in each of the last five years, there have been delays on the Midland Main Line between Nottingham and London because of *(a)* signal failure, *(b)* track failure and *(c)* train failure. [7352]

Mr. Watts: This information is not held centrally. It would be disproportionately expensive to try to compile it.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in how many reported incidents employees have been injured in each of the past five years on the Midland Main Line. [7348]

Mr. Watts: The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate is unable to supply figures for incidents of injuries to employees on the Midland Main Line over the past five years, because accident statistics are not collated on this basis. Since 1 April 1994, accident statistics have been collated on the basis of Railtrack zones, rather than on the previous basis of British Rail regions.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in how many reported incidents safety regulations have been breached in each of the past five years on the Midland Main Line. [7349]

Mr. Watts: The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate is unable to supply figures for incidents of breaches of safety regulations on any specific railway line over the past five years, because accident statistics are not collated on this basis. Since 1 April 1994, accident statistics have been collated on the basis of Railtrack zones, rather than on the previous basis of British Rail regions.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport who has held responsibility for health and safety on the Midland Main Line for the past five years. [7350]

Mr. Watts: The British Railways Board was responsible for the health and safety on the Midland Main Line until 31 March 1994. Since that date, responsibility has rested with Railtrack midland zone and Midland Main Line operating unit.

Green Commuter Plan (Nottingham)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his Department's role in Nottingham's green commuter plan; and if he will make a statement. [7628]

Mr. Norris: Nottingham's green commuter plan is an initiative by Nottingham city council, Nottingham Green Partnership, Transport 2000 Trust and Nottinghamshire county council to encourage local organisations and companies to manage the transport needs of their staff and thus improve the environmental impact of their operations. My Department welcomes voluntary initiatives at a local level such as this.

Bus Lanes

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the use of video cameras on buses to catch those who block bus lanes. [7678]

Mr. Norris: The Traffic Director for London is co-ordinating a pilot study on the A1 in Haringey and Islington to test the potential effectiveness of camera technology for enforcing bus lanes. The project has the support of the Home Office and Transport Ministers and the Metropolitan police and is being undertaken in partnership with industry. Public trials began in December and warning letters will be issued to drivers who are identified as contravening bus lane traffic orders. The traffic director will be reporting the results of the study to Ministers later this year.

"Transport, the Way Ahead"

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what is his latest assessment of the consultation exercise, "Transport, the Way Ahead", initiated by his predecessor. [7677]

Mr. Norris: The exercise has been a considerable success. Many discussions and seminars have been held around the country; over 200 written responses have been submitted.

When Ministers have properly considered the responses, a further report will be published drawing together the threads of the debate.

Buses and Minibuses (Fitness of Drivers)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to ensure that school and minibus drivers do not have responsibility for the transport of children if they have a recent criminal record. [7630]

Mr. Norris: Regulations are already in place with regard to the conduct of those who drive buses or minibuses for hire or reward. Traffic commissioners have powers to suspend or revoke such a driver's entitlement to drive these vehicles if they determine that he or she is not a fit person to do so.

PPG 13: Transport

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the impact of PPG 13: Transport; and if he will make a statement [7675]

Mr. Norris: We are assessing the impact of PPG 13 in a number of ways, through the Government offices for the regions, through our direct contacts with local authorities, and through more formal analysis. We have commissioned, jointly with the Department of the Environment, a research project to assess the implementation of PPG 13, which is currently being Undertaken by Ove Arup and Partners, together with the university of Reading. We published an interim report of this study's findings in September 1995; copies have been placed in the Library.

Public Service Vehicle Operators' Licences

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to ensure that the public service vehicle licence is not issued until checks have been made against criminal records. [7629]

Mr. Norris: Public service vehicle operators' licences are not granted unless traffic commissioners are satisfied that the applicant meets the requirements of good repute. The applicant must declare any relevant convictions that he or any of his employees has had in the last five years. The names of all applicants for PSV operator licences are published in "Notices and Proceedings" in advance of the grant of a licence and circulated to the police, who have a statutory right to make a formal objection to a licence being granted.

The Department is currently exploring ways in which the exchange of information with the police and the courts might be further enhanced.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he proposes to take to ensure that school bus drivers who apply for PSV licences have their applications checked to ensure they have no previous convictions for offences against children; and if he will make a statement. [7703]

Mr. Norris: Traffic commissioners, who are appointed by the Secretary of State, have responsibility for determining whether an applicant for a PSV driver's licence is a fit person to hold such a licence, and may require an applicant to provide such information as he may request. Applicants must declare on their applications any previous convictions for both driving and non-driving offences. If a relevant conviction is proved to exist, traffic commissioners may take action to withhold or withdraw a driver's entitlement to hold a PSV licence.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will ensure that traffic commissioners can check the names of applicants for operators' licences against a central criminal database. [7631]

Mr. Norris: The names of applicants for goods vehicle and public service vehicle operator licences are listed by the traffic area offices in the publications, "Applications and Decisions" and "Notifications and Proceedings", which are published fortnightly. Copies are sent to statutory objectors, including the police, to check the details of applicants for operator licences against their records. Our longer-term aim is the development of a common database for operators and drivers for enforcement and licensing purposes, and which will provide links to enable traffic commissioners to receive information from other sources relevant to their licensing and discipline decisions.

Duty-free Goods

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made on the impact on United Kingdom airports and travellers of the removal of duty free goods in 1999. [7642]

Mr. Norris: I have made no such assessment. The Civil Aviation Authority, in referring questions of charging at the BAA plc airports of Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, has asked the commission to consider, among other things, the implications for charges of the loss of intra-EU duty- and tax-free revenue.

Transport Public Inquiries

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is proposing to reduce those delays at public inquiries on transport matters caused by the obligation for the inspector to hear every person or group who wishes to make representations on a scheme. [7626]

Mr. Watts: None. The relevant rules give certain parties the right to appear at an inquiry. The inspector may permit others to appear, and the rules provide that such permission should not be unreasonably withheld.

Road Network

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to transfer the main road network to *(a)* private or *(b)* public corporations. [7679]

Mr. Watts: None at present.

Rescue Vehicles (Airports)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) on how many occasions fire engines and other rescue vehicles were placed on alert in 1994 for *(a)* Heathrow, *(b)* Gatwick, *(c)* Manchester, and *(d)* Stansted airports; and if he will make a statement; [7587]

(2) which criteria led to emergency fire engines and rescue vehicles being put on alert at United Kingdom airports; and if he will make a statement. [7586]

Mr. Norris: This information is not held by the Department or the Civil Aviation Authority.

Road Safety Sectors (Local Authorities)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what requirement there is for local authorities to maintain a road safety section. [7593]

Mr. Norris: Section 39(2) of the Road Traffic Act 1988 requires each local authority to prepare and carry out a programme of measures designed to promote road safety. In relation to England, the local authorities for this

purpose are county, metropolitan district and London borough councils. In particular, authorities must carry out studies into accidents and must, in the light of those studies, take such measures as appear to them appropriate to prevent such accidents, including the dissemination of information and advice on the use of the roads, the giving of practical training to road users, and the construction, improvement, maintenance or repair of roads for which they are the highway authority. It is the responsibility of each authority to decide on the arrangements to fulfil these requirements.

Internet

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what web site his Department maintains on the Internet; what information is provided there; how often it is updated; what is the address; and if he or his Department answers questions and supplies additional information through the Internet. [7576]

Mr. Norris: My Department publishes information via the CCTA Government information service site at http://www.open.gov.uk. and the Central Office of Information site. Information is updated when changes or additions occur.

The Department's press releases and, separately, those of the Driving Standards Agency are available via the COI at http://www.coi.gov.uk/coi/depts/GDT/GDT.html and GDS/GDS.html respectively. The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency publishes guidance on all aspects of driver and road vehicle registration and licensing, purchase of cherished marks and registration of small ships, on the GIS site at /dvla/dvla.htm. The Marine Accident Investigation Branch's summary of investigations is available at /maib/maibhome.htm. The Highways Agency's business plan for 1995–96 is available at /hiagency/highhome.htm. The overseas section of the Transport Research Laboratory has a home page on the "One World Online" service—http://www.oneworld.org/trl/—outlining the work it carries out for developing countries under the aegis of the Overseas Development Agency. My Department intends to mount early next year a home page on the GIS site, providing links to the above pages and other Departmental information.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has an official Internet e-mail address—sofs.transport@gtnet.gov.uk. The Transport Research Laboratory can communicate via e-mail: its customer services section is at tricial@bdu.trl.co.uk, its overseas section at lindap@o.trl.co.uk and its library at library enquiries@lib.trl.co.uk.

M25

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to widen the M25 if terminal 5 at Heathrow is built. [7724]

Mr. Norris: Plans for the national trunk road programme were announced in "Managing the Trunk Road Programme", published on 28 November. The programme includes two schemes which will widen the M25 between junction 12, the M3, and junction 16, the M40, to five or six lanes in each direction. These schemes are required regardless of whether terminal 5 is built. No further widening of the M25 is planned between these junctions. The programme also includes the construction of the access road from the M25 to terminal 5—"M25 Terminal 5 Spur"—which is, of course, conditional on terminal 5 being built.

Flight Duty Limitations

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of proposals by the joint aviation authorities to change flight duty limitations. [7641]

Mr. Norris: The Civil Aviation Authority has advised that the joint aviation authorities' proposals would provide a level of protection against fatigue equivalent to that provided by its guidance in "CAP371—The Avoidance of Fatigue in Air Crews".

Policy Planning Guidance Notes

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the PPGs or equivalents issued by his Department in the last three years. [7676]

Mr. Norris: The Department of Transport jointly with the Department of the Environment published PPG 13: Transport, in March 1994.

The Department does not issue any other guidance equivalent to the PPG series, although we do publish a wide range of advice on traffic and transport matters.

Railtrack (Investment)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list *(a)* the proportions of the planned £10 billion investment by Railtrack that he expects to be made when it is in (i) public and (ii) private ownership and *(b)* the sources of finance; and what part will be taken by the public finance initiative. [7551]

Mr. Watts: The precise phasing of planned investment is a matter for Railtrack. The Government have announced their intention to privatise the company in May 1996. Future investment in the railway should, as far as is practicable, be a matter for the private sector, with the private sector taking the investment decision, providing the finance and accepting the risks and rewards.

The majority of the planned investment programme described in Railtrack's recently published network management statement relates to the maintenance and renewal of the existing infrastructure and will be funded by the access charges paid by train operating companies. Railtrack has also identified some opportunities for developing the network, and it is envisaged that any investment in these enhancements would in the main be remunerated through additional access charges agreed with train operators. Railtrack may also be eligible to apply for contributions to the costs of specific projects from public sector bodies, including the European Union and local authorities.

Transport Research Budget

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of his Department's 1994–95 transport research budget was devoted to transport by *(a)* rail and *(b)* road. [7559]

Mr. Watts: My Department commissions research in support of the Secretary of State's policy, statutory, operational, regulatory and procurement responsibilities. It is primarily for the rail industry to commission research particular to its needs. In 1994–95, British Rail's budget for research amounted to £18.4 million. Of my Department's total expenditure on research in 1994–95 of £38.7 million—reported in the 1995 forward look of Government-funded science, engineering and technology—under half of 1 per cent. is devoted specifically to rail transport issues. Some 88 per cent. is attributable to road transport.

Cones Hotline

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessment he has made of the value of the cones hotline; [7639]

(2) what plans he has to create a departmental hotline to give motorists details of roadworks and routes; how many staff will be employed: and at what total cost. [7640]

Mr. Watts: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Eruce) on 6 November at column *759*. Staffing of the Highways Agency information line is an operational matter for the agency. I understand that staffing levels are kept under review according to the volume of calls received. The service is currently manned from 8 am to 8 pm on working days and 9 am to 5 pm at weekends. Three members of staff are on duty from 9 am to 5 pm during weekdays, and one member is on duty early morning, evening and at weekends. The total cost of staffing the service is expected to be about £70,000 per annum.

Road Protests (Monitoring)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the total expenditure to date for services supplied to his Department by Bray's Detective Agency in monitoring road protests. [7560]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 9 January 1996:

As you know, John Watts has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the total expenditure to date for services supplied by Brays Detective Agency in monitoring road protests. Brays Detective Agency were employed by solicitors, on behalf of the Department. The total cost to date for services supplied by them in monitoring road protests is £950,588.

Stena Line Ferries

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was his Department's involvement in respect of the recent changes in the frequency and crewing of Stena Line ferries sailing from Harwich. [7704]

Mr. Norris: None. These are commercial matters.

Fishing Vessels (Ownership)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many British-registered fishing vessels are *(a)* British-owned, *(b)* Spanish-owned, *(c)* Dutch-owned, *(d)* owned by other countries; and if he will list the foreign-owned vessels by port or register. [7393]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. Austin Mitchell, dated 9 January 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question about British and foreign-owned fishing vessels registered in British ports.

I regret the information you have requested is not available.

Shipping (Domestic Crews)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the subsidies and tax incentives offered to the shipping industry to employ domestic crews on ships in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* each of the other EU countries. [7627]

Mr. Norris: *(a)* We are pursuing a package of positive measures to improve the attractiveness of the Red Ensign and the competitiveness of British shipping. These include:

Foreign earnings deduction (FED) for seafarers: 100 per cent. allowance on earnings made abroad;

Crew relief costs scheme: grants to alleviate the cost of flying British crews to and from distant ports;

Government assistance for training scheme: grants for the training of British officer trainees to first certificate of competency;

Development of certificated seafarers scheme: grants for British junior officers training for their second certificate of competence.

(b) Most member states have schemes. Measures include grants, subsidies, credit facilities, income tax and social security concessions, and special corporation tax regimes. The economic effects of these measures vary from country to country.

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the expenditure of his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title for each year since 1990–91; and what estimate he has made for 1995–96 based on expenditure to date and existing plans. [6560]

Sir George Young: For the period in question, information is available on expenditure by the Department and its agencies on press advertising in respect of advertising of road works, road safety publicity campaigns, vehicle excise duty enforcement campaigns and on other information campaigns as follows:

	DOT £	Highways Agency £	DVLA £
1990–91	[1]358,497	n/a	85,045
1991–92	[1]721,379	n/a	123,704
1992–93	1,435,015	n/a	137,485
1993–94	2,592,593	n/a	38,964
1994–95	[2]111,589	[2]2,564,067	24,591

[1] Information on advertising placed locally by DOT regional road units was not collected centrally before 1992–93.
[2] From 1994–95 statutory advertising on road works became the responsibility of the Highways Agency.
Figures exclude VAT.

Expenditure to date in the current financial year is as follows:

	DOT £	Highways Agency £	DVLA £
1995–96	503,081	1,211,871	24,142

Projections for 1995–96 are in line with overall expenditure for next year as published in the PES statement.

The further information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Skye Bridge

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to whom the bridge master on the Skye bridge is accountable for decisions about whether or not to close the bridge in adverse weather conditions. [7239]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have been asked to reply.

The bridge master is an employee of a private company—Skye Bridge Ltd.—which operates the tolled crossing and is responsible for maintenance and day-to-day operation of the bridge. By virtue of section 43(4) of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991, the company has powers to close the bridge temporarily in circumstances which include adverse weather. The concession agreement between the company and the Secretary of State requires that the exercise by the company of these powers will be undertaken only after consultation with the police.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Internet

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what web site his Department maintains on the Internet; what information is provided there; how often it is updated; what is the address; and if he or his Department answers questions and supplies additional information through the Internet. [7566]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: "FCO Online", the world wide web service of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office diplomatic wing, was launched on 1 May 1995 and is updated daily. A wide range of information material is published on the site, including speeches, statements, press releases, consular and travel advice, foreign policy briefing papers and ministerial engagements. Latest additions include sound and video files.

British Information Services New York also has its own web site providing material of regional interest in North America.

The Overseas Development Administration does not maintain its own web site—instead it has a home page on the "OneWorld Online" web server. Information provided on or via this page includes ODA press releases, the bi-monthly newspaper *British Overseas Development* and the annual review. The information is not made available on the Internet prior to normal publication procedures.

The addresses are as follows:

FCO (London): http://www.fco.gov.uk/

BIS New York: http://britain.nyc.ny.us/

ODA: http://www.oneworld.org/oda/

Neither wing at present answers questions or supplies additional information through the Internet.

Council of Europe (Russian Membership)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Russian application to join the Council of Europe. [7440]

Mr. David Davis: The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly is due to make a recommendation later this month on the Russian application to join the Council of Europe. We welcome the prospect of Russia's accession.

Commonwealth of Independent States (Nuclear Installations)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the CIS countries regarding the safety of their nuclear power installations. [7718]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Since the 1992 G7 Munich summit, we have been active in promoting improved levels of nuclear safety throughout the former Soviet Union and in central and eastern Europe. Together with our G7 and EU partners, we take full opportunity of meetings with Ministers and officials from these countries to encourage nuclear safety improvements. The closure of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant by the year 2000 was one of the issues which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed with President Kuchma during his recent visit to London. The recently agreed memorandum of understanding between the G7 and Ukraine on the closure of Chernobyl is an example of the successful

international efforts in this area. Preparations are now under way for the G8 nuclear safety summit in Moscow in April. This will focus on a range of nuclear safety and security issues.

NATO Secretary General

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the appointment of the new Secretary General of NATO. [6350]

Mr. David Davis: We very much welcome the appointment of Javier Solana as the new Secretary General of NATO. We look forward to working closely with him.

Entry Clearance

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to raise the fees for entry clearance abroad; to what level the fees for entry clearance for *(a)* single entry visit, *(b)* multiple entry visit, *(c)* business or work, *(d)* student and *(e)* settlement will be raised; and which countries have arrangements with the United Kingdom for free visas. [7418]

Mr. Hanley: The entry clearance application fee for settlement is due to rise on 1 April 1996. The new fee will be announced nearer the time. No decisions have been taken on changes to other fees.

The United Kingdom waives visa fees for certain categories of applicant in accordance with international custom or law, or on policy grounds.

The United Kingdom waives visa fees for nationals of certain countries of the former Soviet Union under the terms of the 1964 UK/USSR agreement abolishing consular fees on visas. These are Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgystan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Ukraine. The agreement will terminate in respect of nationals of Russia on 27 January 1996. The agreement is no longer in effect in respect of nationals of Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what are the present waiting times to first interview for all categories of applicant *(a)* in each country and at each post in the Indian subcontinent, *(b)* Bangkok, *(c)* Manila, *(d)* Lagos, *(e)* Accra, *(f)* Kingston, *(g)* Addis Ababa and *(h)* Sana'a; [7659]

(2) how many applications for entry clearance as working holiday-makers have been *(a)* received, *(b)* granted and *(c)* refused in (i) India, (ii) Bangladesh, (iii) Australia, (iv) Canada, (v) Nigeria, (vi) Ghana, (vii) Pakistan, (viii) Sierra Leone, (ix) Gambia and (x) Jamaica during 1994 and 1995 to the latest convenient date; [7658]

(3) how many explanatory statements relate to entry clearance appeals were awaiting typing at each post in *(a)* the Indian subcontinent, *(b)* Manila, *(c)* Kingston, *(d)* Bangkok, *(e)* Lagos and *(f)* Accra, on the latest date for which information is available; how many staff are employed, (i) full-time and (ii) part-time, to type statements; and when he expects backlogs to be cleared; [7419]

(4) how long a person applying for entry clearance for settlement at the British post in *(a)* Manila, *(b)* Accra, *(c)* Lagos, *(d)* Kingston, *(e)* Nicosia, *(f)* Cairo, *(g)* Bangkok, *(h)* Rabat and *(i)* each post in each country of the Indian subcontinent on 30 September 1995 or the latest date for which information could expect to wait for (i) interview, (ii) referral of the case to the Home Office and the requested information being received by the post, (iii) decisions and (iv) an explanatory statement prepared by the post in the event of an appeal against a refusal to be despatched to the immigration appellate authorities in the United Kingdom. [7657]

Mr. Hanley: In view of the amount of detail needed to answer these questions, I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Government Hospitality Fund (Wine)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out the function of the Government hospitality fund advisory committee for the purchase of wine; if he will name the current members and chairman; what was (i) the sponsoring Department's expenditure in the last year for which information is available and (ii) the remuneration or expenses paid to the chairman and members; and if he will make a statement. [7613]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The function of the Government hospitality fund advisory committee for the purchase of wine is to

"Advise the Minister in Charge of the Government Hospitality Fund on the maintenance of an appropriate standard of wine for use at Official Government functions".

The current members and chairman of the committee are as named in the answer given by the then Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad), to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 24 October 1994, *Official Report*, column *440:*

Chairman:
Sir Ewen Fergusson

Members:
Major John Surtees
Mr. Anthony Hanson
Mr Mark Savage
Mr. Sebastian Payne.

The sponsoring Department's Government hospitality fund total expenditure in the financial year 1994–95 was £1,437,191.

The remuneration or expenses paid to the chairman and members of the committee is nil.

Turkey

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received on the customs union with Turkey; and if he will make a statement. [7596]

Mr. David Davis: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has had many discussions on the EU/Turkey customs union, and warmly welcomes the European Parliament's decision of 13 December to approve it.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations have been made to the Government of Turkey covering *(a)* human rights, *(b)* the imprisonment of Members of Parliament and *(c)* the occupation of northern Cyprus; and if he will make a statement. [7597]

Mr. Davis: We regularly make clear our concern about human rights to the Turkish Government. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister raised this issue and that of Cyprus when he met the Turkish Prime Minister on 22 November. Our embassy in Ankara has frequently raised the imprisonment of the DEP deputies, most recently following the Appeals Court hearing on 26 October.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of the USA concerning Turkish membership of the European customs union. [7598]

Mr. Davis: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and President Clinton agreed when they met on 29 November on the importance of consolidating the relationship between Turkey and the EU, and that customs union was an integral part of that relationship.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what actions have been taken by Her Majesty's embassy in Turkey to press for the release of the imprisoned Members of Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [7599]

Mr. Davis: Our embassy in Ankara made representations to the Turkish authorities on a weekly basis in advance of the Appeals Court hearing on 26 October. They have raised it again since. The four deputies who remain in prison have appealed to the European Court of Human Rights.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions have been held with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and other agencies on the human rights situation in Turkey. [7600]

Mr. Davis: We have not spoken recently with UNHCR about human rights in Turkey although there has been some discussion within the Council of Europe. We frequently hold discussions with non-governmental organisations about human rights, and regularly make clear our concerns to the Turkish Government.

United Nations Compensation Fund

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much the United Kingdom has transferred to the United Nations escrow account in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 778; how much of this has been subsequently passed to the UN compensation fund; if the sum transferred included interest on the original amount; and if he will make a statement. [7608]

Mr. Hanley: A total of US $736,938.12—including accrued interest of US $64,384.69—was transferred in February 1995 to the UN escrow account in accordance with Security Council resolution No. 778. Just over US $221,000 was subsequently passed to the UN compensation fund. No other unencumbered oil-related assets have been identified.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many claims have been made by United Kingdom citizens to the UN compensation fund for victims of the Gulf war; how many of these have been settled; and if he will make a statement. [7610]

Mr. Hanley: Some 4,990 claims in various categories have been submitted to the UN compensation commission by the Government on behalf of individuals and companies; 1,468 of these have been assessed so far, of which 148 have been settled.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the operation of the UN compensation commission fund for victims of the Gulf war. [7612]

Mr. Hanley: The United Nations compensation commission in Geneva was established in 1991, under UN Security Council resolutions Nos. 687 and 692, to deal with claims for compensation for direct loss, damage or injury resulting from Iraq's unlawful invasion and occupation of Kuwait. Claims have submitted by individuals, corporations and Governments. The commission consists of three parts: First, the policy-making Governing Council. Membership mirrors that of the Security Council; secondly, the secretariat, led by an executive secretary, which is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the commission; thirdly, panels of commissioners, who are experts in international law, finance and other fields, and are responsible for adjudicating the claims.

Having quickly established the machinery to deal with an unprecedented number of claims, it has already assessed 2 million of the 2.6 million claims received.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the maximum compensation paid to *(a)* an individual and *(b)* a family from the UN compensation commission fund for victims of the Gulf war; and if he will make a statement. [7609]

Mr. Hanley: Compensation has been paid to a total of 3,967 category B—serious personal injury or death—claimants, of whom 148 are British. The maximum that an individual and a family can receive in this category is US $2,500 and US $10,000 respectively.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total number and value of payments made under the UN compensation commission fund for Gulf war victims; what was the nationality of the successful claimants and if he will make a statement. [7611]

Mr. Hanley: A total of 3,967 claims amounting to US $13,470,000 have been paid so far. The Governments and international organisations which submitted these claims are as follows:

Algeria
Australia
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Belgium
Bulgaria

Canada
China
Egypt
Ethiopia
Finland
France
Germany
Greece
India
Iran
Ireland
Israel
Italy
Jordan
Kenya
Korea
Kuwait
Lebanon
Malaysia
Mauritius
Morocco
Netherlands
Pakistan
Philippines
Poland
Russian Federation
Slovak Republic
Somalia
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Sweden
Syria
Thailand
Tunisia
Uganda
Ukraine
United Kingdom
United States
Yemen
F. R. of Yugoslavia
UNDP Jersualem
UNDP Kuwait
UNDP Washington
UNHCR Bulgaria
UNHCR Canada
UNHCR Geneva
UNRWA Vienna

Landmines

Mr. Mudie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's policies on the sale of landmines. [6359]

Mr. David Davis: Our national moratorium on the export of anti-personnel land mines comprises, since March 1995, a total ban on the export of non-self-destructing or non-detectable anti-personnel landmines; plus a ban on the export of *all* anti-personnel landmines to countries which have not ratified the 1981 United Nations weaponry convention. Our aim is to restrict the availability of long-lived anti-personnel mines, which are the most dangerous to civilians; and to ensure that even self-destructing mines can be acquired only by responsible countries. We are pressing for international agreement on these lines, inter alia in the context of the current review of the 1980 UN weaponry convention.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many mobile telephones have been supplied to his Department in each of the last eight years; and in each of those years how many different suppliers were involved. [8028]

Mr. Hanley: The FCO diplomatic and aid wings had the following number of mobile telephones supplied during the last eight years, from the listed number of suppliers:

Year	*Number of phones*	*Number of suppliers*
1988	3	1
1989	28	3
1990	28	3
1991	52	3
1992	30	4
1993	19	2
1994	64	6
1995	86	7

Departmental Staff (Members' Letters)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many officials he employed *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time in his Department in each of the last three years to answer letters sent to him from hon. Members; and what was the estimated overall cost of replying to them in each of the last three years. [5619]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* There are Departments within the FCO which have correspondence units dealing specifically with letters from the general public and Members of Parliament. The remainder deal with such correspondence within their existing staff resources.

To provide a breakdown of the expenditure on these services would incur disproportionate cost.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how many refugees from the former Yugoslavia have been given asylum status in each of the member states of the EU; [7232]

(2) how may refugees from the former Yugoslavia have been granted asylum status in the United Kingdom. [7231]

Mr. Kirkhope: I have been asked to reply.

During the period 1991 to the end of the November 1995, there were in the United Kingdom approximately 250 grants of asylum to nationals of the former

Yugoslavia. Most of the decisions were made in 1995. Over the same time period, approximately 2,050 former Yugoslavs were refused asylum but granted exceptional leave in the United Kingdom.

In addition to the above, the Government announced on 30 November 1992 that the United Kingdom was willing to receive 1,000 people from Bosnia and other parts of the former Yugoslavia classified by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees as being vulnerable and in need of evacuation, together with their dependants. As at 19 December 1995, a total of 910 principals and 1,216 dependents had arrived. On 6 August it was announced that a further 500 would be accepted. To date, 176 persons from this quota have arrived.

The available information on grants of asylum or exceptional leave to remain by European Union member states is given in the table.

Grants of Asylum or Exceptional leave to Remain to nationals of the former Yugoslavia by EU Member States[1], January to June 1995

Nationality	*Grants of Refugee status*	*Not recognised as a Refugee but granted exceptional leave to remain[2]*
Austria	50	0
Belgium	55	0
Denmark	10	10
Finland	0	5
France	150	0
Germany	1,745	0
Greece	0	25
Ireland	5	0
Italy	5	0
Luxembourg	0	0
Netherlands	0	0
Portugal	0	0
Sweden	0	0
Spain	0	0
United Kingdom	25	570
Total	2,050	615

[1] Figures are rounded to the nearest 5.
[2] Includes equivalent status used by European countries.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Probate Sub-registries

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many probate sub-registries there were in *(a)* each county in Wales and *(b)* Wales as a whole in each year since 1993; and what his estimate is of the number in 1997. [6449]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, dated 9 January 1996:

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply to your Question about probate sub-registries.

The probate service consists of District Probate Registries, Probate Offices and Probate Sub-Registries.

The number and type of probate offices located in Wales has not changed since 1993 and is as follows:

Type of office	*Town*	*County*
District probate registry	Cardiff	Mid Glamorgan
Probate office	Bridgend	Mid Glamorgan
Probate office	Pontypridd	Mid Glamorgan
Probate office	Newport	Gwent
Probate office	Rhyl	Clwyd
Probate office	Wrexham	Clwyd
Probate office	Aberystwyth	Dyfed
Probate office	Haverfordwest	Dyfed
Probate office	Swansea	West Glamorgan
Probate sub-registries	Bangor	Gwynedd
Probate sub-registries	Carmarthen	Dyfed

The Court Service is currently consulting interested parties on the proposed closure of some Probate Sub-Registries and will begin public consultation in the new year on those probate offices also recommended for closure. The final decision on the proposed closures will be made by the Lord Chancellor following those consultations. It is therefore not possible at this stage to estimate the number of Probate Sub-Registries and probate offices in 1997.

Executive Agencies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if answers sent to hon. Members in reply to parliamentary questions by the head of executive agencies in his Department are *(a)* seen, *(b)* approved and *(c)* amended by him before they are sent; and if he will identify such letters to which amendments by him have been made in 1994–95. [7821]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Parliamentary Questions are passed to the head of an executive agency for reply when the matter is one delegated to him or her under the agency framework document. I see a copy of the reply before it is sent, but would not normally intervene in operational matters. Neither I, nor my predecessor, have amended any such letters during the time specified.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Internet

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Lord President of the Council, what web site his Department maintains on the Internet; what information is provided there; how often it is updated; what is the address; and if he or his Department answers questions and supplies additional information through the Internet. [7579]

Mr. Newton: The Privy Council Office does not use the Internet and has no plans to do so.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the awards made to organisations in Worcestershire from national lottery funds; and what was the size of the grant and the project cost in each case. [6133]

Mr. Sproat: Figures for national lottery funds broken down by county areas are not currently available. There have, however, been 312 awards made to organisations in the west midlands, to date, totalling over £51 million.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the receipts deposited by the organisers and the total amounts paid out for each week by them in respect of the national lottery for each week of its operation to date. [7013]

Mr. Sproat: At 8 January 1996, receipts into the national lottery distribution fund totalled £1.4 billion.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what request she has made to Camelot for information about the sale of national lottery winners' names to list brokers; what reply she has received with particular reference to the identity of beneficiaries of such sales; and if she will make a statement. [5940]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* I have not approached Camelot about the sale of national lottery winners' names to list brokers. The Director General of the National Lottery, Mr. Peter Davis, has licensed Camelot to run the national lottery and he regulates its operations. I have therefore asked the director general to write to the hon. Member, placing copies of his response in the Libraries of the House.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what recent representations she has received relating to the distribution of national lottery funding in Scotland. [4639]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* I have received a number of representations about the distribution of national lottery proceeds. Scotland has fared extremely well. To date, 550 awards have been made from proceeds totalling £112 million.

Channel 5

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when Channel 5 television is expected to commence broadcasting; when the service will be available in Northern Ireland; which regions of Northern Ireland will *(a)* receive and *(b)* be unable to receive Channel 5 television programmes; and if she will make a statement. [6919]

Mr. Sproat: The start date for Channel 5 is a matter for the Independent Television Commission, which is responsible for licensing it. The Commission has indicated that the service must start simultaneously in a minimum of two major areas, no later than 1 January 1997. The transmission plan for Channel 5 includes two sites for Northern Ireland: Black Mountain, which is predicted to be able to serve about 670,000 people, and Londonderry, with around 70,000 people. Predicted coverage maps for these sites are available from the commission. The timing of the provision of the service in Northern Ireland will depend on the completion of international frequency co-ordination discussions.

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what has been the expenditure of her *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title for each year since 1990–91; and what estimate she has made for 1995–96 based on expenditure to date and existing plans. [6564]

Mr. Sproat: The information requested is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Houses in Multiple Occupation

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment her Department has made of the extent to which business organisations advertise the availability of residential vacancies in hotels, hostels and houses in multiple occupation in tourist areas to attract unemployment benefit claimants; what is the nature of such organisations; and if she will make a statement. [5391]

Mr. Sproat: I share the widespread concern that the rapid expansion of hostels in a number of popular resort areas is causing very serious problems. My Department has made no assessment of advertising by hostel landlords, although we are indeed aware of this practice. The Government recently announced some measures designed to tackle poor standards in houses in multiple occupation including hostels. These include a new duty of care on HMO landlords and new simplified registration schemes which may be brought in by any local authority. I understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment intends to bring forward legislation as soon as possible.

Internet

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what web site her Department maintains on the Internet; what information is provided there; how often it is updated; what is the address; and if she or her Department answers questions and supplies additional information through the Internet. [7571]

Mr. Sproat: The Department of National Heritage is in the process of establishing a pilot site on the world wide web which will provide information about the work of the Department and the range of activities which it and its sponsored bodies cover. At present, DNH press releases are available on the world wide web from the Central Office of Information on http://www.coi.gov.uk/coi/depts/GHE/GHE.html. The DNH web site will be updated to reflect developments and changes in the work of the Department. The range of information provided on the site will be reviewed in the course of the current pilot. The address of the Department of National Heritage world wide web site will be made available in due course and it will be accessible from the CCTA's open government server.

Ministerial Travel and Accommodation Costs

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is her estimate of the total cost for herself and other departmental Ministers for each year

since 1991–92, including the current year of *(a)* overseas travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers and their advisers, *(b)* car and chauffeuring costs of Ministers, *(c)* ministerial security costs and *(d)* domestic travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers. [6392]

Mr. Sproat: While all the information requested is not available, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost, the available information is as follows:

	1993–94 £	*1994–95* £	[1]*1995–96* £
Overseas travel and subsistence	14,967	46,092	15,361
Government car services	192,693	190,165	120,675
UK travel and subsistence	10,648	24,868	14,882

[1] To date.

There are no comparable figures for earlier years as the Department's payment system was not in place until 1993, following the establishment of the Department of National Heritage in 1992.

Statue of Miner, Kent

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will take steps to ensure that the statue of the miner outside Richborough power station, Kent, remains in place as a monument to the county's links with the coal industry; and if she will make a statement. [7240]

Mr. Sproat: If the hon. Member sends details of the statue, including photographs and a location plan, to me and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, we will ask advisers at English Heritage to assess whether it merits protection as a structure of special architectural or historic interest.

Departmental Running Costs

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is her estimate of the cost of running her departmental office, and that of her predecessor, for each year since 1990–91 including the current year, broken down into *(a)* telephone bills, *(b)* total staff costs, *(c)* press and communications, *(d)* entertainment, *(e)* alcoholic drinks, *(f)* non-alcoholic drinks, *(g)* stationery, *(h)* office refurbishment and (i) other. [6391]

Mr. Sproat: While the information requested is not available, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost, the following information is available:

	1993–94 £	*1994–95* £	[1]*1995–96* £
Total staff cost	401,738	338,572	257,196
Hospitality/entertainment	3,700	564	1,905
Government car service/taxi services	133,183	92,213	46,710
Other costs	15,833	1,273	—
Total	554,454	432,622	305,811

[1] To date.

There are no comparable figures for earlier years as the Department's payment system was not in place until 1993, following the establishment of the Department of National Heritage in 1992.

National Millennium Commission

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) if she will make a statement on the estimated outturn costs of clearing up the industrial waste at each of the sites proposed for the national millennium exhibition; [4816]

(2) if she will make a statement on the suitability for development of the various sites proposed for the national millennium exhibition; and to what extent site clearing operations, including the removal of contaminated ground, will jeopardise the building schedules. [4817]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I shall write to the hon. Member in my capacity as chairman of the Millennium Commission and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Scratchcards

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many Camelot outlets to date have lost their franchise to sell lottery instant scratchcards on the grounds that they had been selling them to children under 16 years of age. [5238]

Mr. Sproat: This is an operational matter for Camelot Group plc. I have therefore asked the Director General of the National Lottery, who is responsible for regulating the operation of the Lottery, to write to the hon. Member, placing copies of his response in the Libraries of the House.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what progress her Department has made regarding establishing a contact point with responsibility for liaison with relevant business support organisations and taking forward small and medium enterprise-related public procurement initiatives. [6718]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* My Department and its two agencies have decided that because of their relatively small expenditure on goods and services it would not be worth while to have a separate contact point for small and medium enterprises.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what work her Department has done to develop best practice in the publication of departmental procurement guidance material relevant to the needs of small and medium enterprises. [6619]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* My Department maintains an entry in the Government publication, "Tendering for Government Contracts" which advises small and medium enterprises on procurement procedures and lists procurement contact points. A copy of this publication is available in the House Library.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what advice has been given to procurement staff

on the implications of purchasing from small and medium enterprises. [6621]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* The following guidance has been issued to the procurement staff in my Department and its agencies:

"Size may be relevant to the selection of tenderers, but only insofar as it is necessary to assess whether or not the task is within their capability. Once that assessment has been made, relative size is likely to be less significant than skills, efficiency, experience, and reliability—characteristics relevant to value for money and just as likely to be found in small firms as in large and particularly relevant in the procurement of services".

Goods and Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much her Department paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1994–95. [6505]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* While the information requested is not available, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost, my Department paid a total of £10 million for goods and services in 1994–95.

Small Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what meetings her Department has had since May 1995 with organisations representing small firms to review tendering procedures. [6620]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* Neither my Department nor its two agencies have attended any meetings with organisations representing small firms.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what has been the outcome of her Department's review of measures taken to facilitate small firms' access to appropriate areas of Government procurement in the light of best practice. [6664]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* My Department and its agencies will be carrying out this review during the first quarter of 1996.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will provide for schemes so far agreed under the PFI the level of financing costs above the current cost of Government borrowing for the scheme with *(a)* the highest financing costs and *(b)* the lowest costs. [5753]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* Schemes are assessed under the private finance initiative for overall best value for money in providing a specified service taking account of design, building, financing and operation as a whole. It is not therefore possible to provide information in the form requested.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will provide a breakdown of administration costs incurred to date and forecast for the future of PFI work. [5751]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* Neither my Department nor its agencies have dedicated private finance units, and it is not therefore possible to quantify separately from other activity that attributable to the procurement of public services through the private finance initiative. I would not, however, expect procurement through the PFI to increase administrative costs beyond those which would be associated with other means of providing public services.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will provide revenue forecasts for the current year and the next five years of expenditure on schemes provided under the PFI. [5752]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 7 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *374*.

Departmental Staff (Members' Letters)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many officials she employed *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time in her Department in each of the last three years to answer letters sent to her from hon. Members; and what was the estimated overall cost of replying to them in each of the last three years. [5614]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* No staff in this Department are employed exclusively in answering letters from hon. Members, and it is not possible to estimate what the overall cost of replying to letters in each of the last three years would be.

BBC Charter

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what further arrangements will be made for *(a)* public and *(b)* parliamentary debate on the future of the BBC charter. [7136]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* There has already been substantial debate on the future of the BBC. The Government's consultation document was published in November 1992 and received some 6,600 responses. In the light of those, the Government set out their proposals in a White Paper "The future of the BBC: Serving the nation, Competing world-wide" which generated comments from some 200 individuals and organisations and which was debated in both Houses. On 27 November, the Government published the BBC's draft charter and agreement, designed to put into effect the policies set out in the White Paper. Both Houses of Parliament will have an opportunity to debate these documents when parliamentary business allows and before they come into effect.

HEALTH

St. Mary's Hospital, Isle of Wight

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the finances of St. Mary's hospital, Isle of Wight. [6235]

Mr. Horam: St. Mary's hospital is currently reviewing its financial position with the help of its local health commission and the national health service regional

office. The trust is taking the action necessary to meet all its financial duties by the end of 1996–97, as well as producing improvements to service delivery.

Capital Allocations

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the capital allocation by region in each of the last five years. [6337]

Mr. Horam: The capital allocation by region in each of the last five years is shown in the tables.

£ thousands

Region	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Northern	91,954	100,324	107,797
Yorkshire	104,209	123,980	125,598
Trent	140,577	157,142	158,336
East Anglia	56,139	62,913	69,169
North-West Thames	84,254	105,345	105,887
North-East Thames	107,297	124,733	119,041
South-East Thames	109,882	115,261	120,626
South-West Thames	80,339	100,114	94,945
Wessex	85,441	92,330	100,988
Oxford	62,934	70,932	77,383
South Western	94,770	111,399	114,964
West Midlands	166,130	168,182	175,577
Mersey	70,249	79,925	82,670
North Western	120,509	129,269	139,966
Total	1,374,684	1,541,852	1,592,947

£ thousand

Region	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Northern and Yorkshire	225,612	214,806
Trent	153,540	150,370
Anglian and Oxford	143,121	149,131
North Thames	218,158	231,037
South Thames	210,007	206,359
South and West	211,454	199,022
West Midlands	169,008	162,545
North-West	213,869	215,513
Total	1,544,769	1,528,783

1. The above includes allocations both to regional health authorities and to trusts.
2. Totals may vary due to roundings.

Child Psychotherapy

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many child psychotherapy advisers are currently employed in his Department. [7739]

Mr. Horam: The Department maintains close contact with the child psychotherapy bodies but does not employ any child psychotherapy advisers.

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many qualified child psychotherapists are practising in the United Kingdom *(a)* by health authority and *(b)* in the inner cities. [7740]

Mr. Malone: The table shows the number of qualified child psychotherapists employed by the national health service in England by regional health authority area. Separate information on child psychotherapists employed in inner cities is not available centrally.

NHS hospitals and community health services qualified child psychotherapists—England by region as at 30 September 1994

Whole-time equivalents

	Qualified child psychotherapists
England total	220
Northern and Yorkshire	10
Trent	20
Anglia and Oxford	10
North Thames	80
South Thames	30
South and West	30
West Midlands	'
North-West	10
Special health authorities	20

Notes:
' Denotes figures of five and under.
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10 whole-time equivalent.
Source:
Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census.

Information relating to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales and for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the extent to which preventive psychotherapeutic work with young people is likely to reduce the risk of adolescent violence and drug taking. [7738]

Mr. Bowis: Several studies have shown that boys who exhibit aggressive and anti-social behaviour have an increased risk of later alcoholism and drug taking. Cognitive behavioural therapy has shown promise in reducing the duration of a disorder in the treatment of conduct and oppositional disorders which may or may not involve aggressive behaviour. Other psychotherapeutic treatment approaches may be relevant if the aggressive behaviour is associated with another disorder with a specific approach. The age of the young person, the appropriateness of family involvement in the treatment and other individual factors will all play a part in determining the best course of action.

Drug Misuse

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will establish a public inquiry to investigate the deaths of heroin addicts in north Cheshire who were recently transferred to different treatment regimes, and if he will make a statement. [7670]

Mr. Bowis: I understand that these matters are still the subject of coroners' investigations and it will not therefore be appropriate for me to comment at this stage.

Emergency Provision (London)

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the present state of availability of emergency beds in London and the available capacity in London's accident and emergency units to respond to an increase in emergency admissions. [8060]

Mr. Malone: London has 24-hour accident and emergency departments in 35 of its hospitals. Trusts and health authorities work together to ensure that changes in demand are met.

Children (Research)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research and findings his Department has carried out into a national monitoring system to detect trends in morbidity and disability in seven-year-old children of different birth weights; and if he will make a statement. [8043]

Mr. Bowis: The departmentally funded national perinatal epidemiology unit has undertaken a pilot study to explore how morbidity and disability in children of different birth weight might be monitored. The study has revealed some of the issues that must be addressed in devising a reliable, cost-effective, national system.

Energy Saving

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made by each health authority in the UK towards the energy saving targets in "Climate Change: the UK programme". [7958]

Mr. Horam: The national health service energy saving programme commenced in April 1991 with a target set to reduce national energy consumption by 15 per cent. over five years to March 1996. The broad total savings in energy consumption achieved in England by March 1995, amended from previous published figures, amounts to 6.5 per cent.

This still represents a significant improvement in efficiency and builds on earlier achievements where consumption was reduced by 21 per cent. between 1977 and 1991. Increased activity and technological advances have contributed to the slowdown in savings.

Information is not available centrally for each authority or NHS trust in the United Kingdom.

NHS Supplies Authority

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce market testing in relation to the activities of the NHS supplies authority. [8074]

Mr. Horam: In common with all health authorities and trusts, the national health service supplies authority is free to market test its non-core activities, wherever it can add value by doing so. A number of services have been contracted out, and in particular about 20 per cent. of NHS supplies' logistics costs involve third party contractors who operate two distribution centres and most of the transport operations. NHS supplies is actively developing a proposed logistics strategy which is aimed at improving services and reducing warehousing and distribution costs, and includes options for further market testing of these services.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mobile telephones have been supplied to his Department in each of the last eight years; and in each of those years how many different suppliers were involved. [8036]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health keeps records of the number of active mobile telephones, which currently stands at about 500. Annual supply figures are not recorded.

The main supplier from 1991 to 1994 was BT (Cellnet). Since April 1994 Vodafone has been the sole supplier on winning a tendered contract. Mobile telephones are obtained to meet operational needs and are issued to individuals for official use.

Special Hospitals Service Authority

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for health (1) pursuant to his reply of 19 December *Official Report*, column *1134*, if he will make it his policy to answer parliamentary questions or letters from hon. Members on behalf of the Special Hospitals Service Authority; [7991]

(2) what consideration led him not to forward to the SHSA the hon. Member's question of 19 December about the use of telephones by inmates in institutions from the criminally insane. [7986]

Mr. Bowis: The management and operation of the special hospitals are the responsibility of the Special Hospitals Service Authority. It is not our practice to forward parliamentary questions to health authorities for reply, but it is open to the hon. Member to raise these matter with the chairman of the authority.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of state for Health if he will list the membership of the Special Hospitals Service Authority, together with the dates of appointment and retirement. [7987]

Mr. Bowis: The members of the authority and the dates on which they were first appointed are listed as follows. We have announced proposals for abolishing the authority from 1 April 1996 and shall shortly be laying the necessary regulations to give effect to this.

Name	*Position*	*Date of Appointment*
Non-Executive members:		
Mrs. Anne-Marie Nelson	Chairman	18 April 1994
Dr. James Higgins	Vice-Chairman	1 October 1989
Miss Joy Young	Member	1 December 1993
Ms Sheila Drew-Smith	Member	1 June 1994
Executive members:		
Mr. Charles Kaye	Chief Executive	23 October 1989
Mr. Robert Hawkins	Director of Finance	1 February 1990
Mr. Frank Powell	Director of Nursing	1 December 1989
Dr. Dilys Jones	Medical Director	1 April 1995

Ambulance Service, Greater Manchester

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the cost per head of population of the ambulance service in Greater Manchester; and if he will make a statement. [8009]

Mr. Horam: The cost per head of population of the ambulance service is broken down into two parts. For the emergency service, the cost per person is £6.37 per year. For the non-emergency service, the cost is £2.68 per year.

Private Finance Initiative

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the progress of private finance initiative projects in the NHS in London. [8061]

Mr. Horam: The national health service in London is making good progress with the private finance initiative. A number of projects have been approved and in a number of others private finance possibilities are being explored.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the consultancy contracts awarded by *(a)* health authorities and *(b)* NHS trusts to Newchurch and Co. in relation to private finance initiative contracts, indicating the value of each of those contracts. [8114]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally. It is a matter for each national health service organisation to establish its own needs where the employment of external contractors may be required.

Environmental Control Equipment

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research and findings his Department has carried out into clinical trials of environmental control equipment; if he will make a statement. [8044]

Mr. Bowis: As part of the national health service research and development strategy there is a nationally funded programme of research on physical and complex disability managed by South and West region which includes a project to review current provision of environmental controls equipment. This is being conducted by the regional rehabilitation centre at South Birmingham community health trust. In addition, the Medical Devices Agency has recently published a comparative evaluation of environmental control systems. Copies of this evaluation will be placed in the Library.

Cemfuel (Health Effects)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice has been given to general practitioners in the Clitheroe area concerning possible health effects resulting from the burning of cemfuel. [7944]

Mr. Horam: This is a matter for East Lancashire health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contract Mr. W. Ashworth, chairman, for details.

Trent Healthline

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements have been made to continue the Trent healthline with effect from 1 April 1996; and if he will make a statement. [8042]

Mr. Horam: From 1 April 1996 responsibility for ensuring the provision of health information services will be devolved to health authorities, in accordance with revised health service guidance issued on 18 September 1995, HSG(95)44, copies of which are available in the Library.

It will be for each health authority to decide, in accordance with the quality standards set in HSG(95)44, whether to contract with the existing service provider or to make alternative arrangements for the provision of the service. Regional offices of the NHS executive monitor the transition closely.

Pharmacies and Dispensaries

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has had to modify application of the one-mile rule regarding general practitioner dispensaries, with special reference to taking account of local preferences. [8202]

Mr. Malone: The regulations governing dispensing by doctors are designed to safeguard the needs of patients and ensure, where possible, that patients enjoy access to the expert services of both the medical and pharmaceutical professions. I have received representations from both professions about the application of the rules and my hon. Friend wrote to me last year about taking into account local preferences.

Mr. Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he takes to be fully informed of the views of local residents when considering applications for new pharmacies, with special reference to the one-mile rule. [8203]

Mr. Malone: An application to provide pharmaceutical services under the national health service is considered by the family health services authority in whose locality the proposed pharmacy is situated. The FHSA must consult every relevant community health council about the views of local residents.

Meningitis

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what epidemiological investigations have been made into possible common factors relating to outbreaks, as published in the monitor MB2 series of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, of meningitis of *(a)* group B and *(b)* group C. [8196]

Mr. Horam: Investigation of outbreaks of meningococcal disease is the responsibility of the local consultant in communicable disease control in each health district. It is standard practice for the CCDC to look for links between cases, such as attendance at the same college, school or nursery. In some outbreaks, nose and/or throat swabs are taken from close contacts of cases before antibiotics are given. Where a high carriage rate of the organism causing the disease has been observed, this may be the reason for the outbreak. Highest carriage rates are typically seen in teenage children.

A number of studies have been carried out in the United Kingdom to determine factors associated with increased

risk of meningococcal disease. In these studies three possible risk factors have been identified: passive smoking, close contact and recent influenza infection.

Hospital Admissions

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 20 December, *Official Report*, column *1212* if he will now take steps to monitor centrally *(a)* delays of admission of seriously ill patients to hospital as published definitions of delay, *(b)* the reasons for such delays and *(c)* the steps taken by district health authorities to prevent their repetition. [8185]

Mr. Horam: No. We are, however, monitoring the performance of NHS trusts in meeting the patients charter standard for emergency admissions.

Day Care Services (Children)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by what means the proposed children's services planning guidance in the order arising from section 17(4) of the Children Act 1989 will operate within the terms of paragraph 16 of the draft guidance to social services and education departments of local authorities requiring joint review, planning and co-ordination of all day care services for children under eight years of age. [8187]

Mr. Bowis: The proposed order places no new requirement on local authorities in respect of day care services for children under eight. The guidance will encourage local authorities to have regard to the latest section 19 review when preparing or reviewing children's services plans.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 will be applied to day care centres and out-of-school child care facilities as described in the Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations, volume 2. [8195]

Mr. Bowis: The Disability Discrimination Act is expected to apply to day care centres and out-of-school child care facilities in the same way that it applies to other facilities. This is currently subject to consultation.

Medical Devices

Mr. Eastham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what code of standards applies to the Medical Devices Agency. [7790]

Mr. Horam: The framework of policy, planning control, delegations and accountability within which the Medical Devices Agency operates is described in its framework document, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Eastham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the recorded number of failures of infusion devices causing *(a)* fatal doses of medication or *(b)* incapacitating electrical shock, for each of the last five years. [7791]

Mr. Horam: Over the last five years, there have been no fatalities reported to the Medical Devices Agency in which a failure of an infusion device caused a fatal dose of medication. One incident was reported involving an incapacitating electric shock.

Mr. Eastham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what standards govern the operation of foetal monitoring devices. [7793]

Mr. Horam: There are no standards specifically governing the operation of foetal monitoring devices.

Mr. Eastham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated as to the extent to which ultrasonic equipment gives incorrect readings. [7792]

Mr. Horam: None.

NHS Staff

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 28 November, *Official Report*, column *614*, on national health service staff if he will provide details of medical locums by specialty. [7753]

Mr. Malone: The information is not available in the form requested. However, table 17A of the medical and dental manpower census, copies of which are available in the Library, shows directly employed locums in hospitals by specialty. This information excludes, for example, agency locums and public health and community health service locums. This latter information is not available centrally.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 12 December, *Official Report*, column *579*, on medical and non-medical vacancies in the national health service, if he will provide a regional breakdown of figures. [7754]

Mr. Malone: The regional breakdown of vacancy data is shown in the tables. Data on junior doctors and the regional breakdown of consultants for 1991 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Information on vacancies for general practitioners is not centrally available. Figures on nursing and midwifery collected by the office of manpower and economics are available in the annual report of the review body of nursing staff, midwives health visitors and professions allied to medicine. Copies of the review body's report are available in the Library and includes regional data.

Whole-time equivalent of hospital medical consultant vacant posts by region at 30 September

	1990	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
England	700	540	480	570
Northern	70	30	30	40
Yorkshire	40	50	30	40
Trent	70	80	50	70
East Anglia	20	20	10	30
North-West Thames	20	20	30	40
North-East Thames	70	50	80	50
South-East Thames	40	10	30	40
South-West Thames	70	30	30	30
Wessex	40	10	10	10
Oxford	20	0	20	10
South Western	60	40	30	30

Whole-time equivalent of hospital medical consultant vacant posts by region at 30 September

	1990	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
West Midlands	110	110	70	100
Mersey	20	20	30	40
North Western	60	60	50	50
Special Health Authorities	10	10	0	0

Figures are rounded to the nearest 10. A regional breakdown for 1991 is available only at disproportionate cost.

Whole-time equivalent of junior doctor vacant posts by region as at 30 September 1990

	Senior registrar	*Registrar*	*Senior house officer*
England	230	230	70
Northern	10	20	0
Yorkshire	10	10	10
Trent	40	20	10
East Anglia	10	20	0
North-West Thames	0	10	0
North-East Thames	20	30	10
South-East Thames	20	10	0
South-West Thames	10	10	10
Wessex	10	10	10
Oxford	20	10	0
South Western	20	10	0
West Midlands	20	20	10
Mersey	10	50	0
North Western	30	20	10
Special Health Authorities	10	0	0

Vacant post figures for house officers are not collected.
Figures are rounded to the nearest 10, therefore individual grades may not add up to the total.

Whole-time equivalent of junior doctor vacant posts by region as at 30 September 1992

	Senior registrar	*Registrar*	*Senior house officer*
England	180	280	120
Northern	10	20	10
Yorkshire	30	50	10
Trent	20	30	10
East Anglia	10	10	0
North-West Thames	10	20	10
North-East Thames	20	40	20
South-East Thames	0	10	10
South-West Thames	10	20	20
Wessex	0	0	0
Oxford	0	0	0
South Western	20	30	10
West Midlands	40	20	10
Mersey	10	30	10
North Western	0	20	10
Special Health Authorities	10	10	10

Vacant post figures for house officers are not collected.
Figures are rounded to the nearest 10, therefore individual grades may not add up to the total.

Whole-time equivalent of junior doctor vacant posts by region as at 30 September 1993

	Senior registrar	*Registrar*	*Senior house officer*
England	200	310	130
Northern	0	0	10
Yorkshire	10	30	10

Whole-time equivalent of junior doctor vacant posts by region as at 30 September 1993

	Senior registrar	*Registrar*	*Senior house officer*
Trent	40	50	10
East Anglia	20	20	10
North-West Thames	20	30	10
North-East Thames	20	40	20
South-East Thames	0	10	10
South-West Thames	10	20	0
Wessex	0	10	0
Oxford	0	0	0
South Western	20	50	10
West Midlands	20	20	10
Mersey	40	30	10
North Western	0	10	10
Special Health Authorities	0	0	0

Vacant post figures for house officers are not collected.
Figures are rounded to the nearest 10, therefore individual grades may not add up to the total.

Whole-time equivalent of junior doctor vacant posts by region as at 30 September 1994

	Senior registrar	*Registrar*	*Senior house officer*
England	200	280	170
Northern	10	10	10
Yorkshire	20	20	10
Trent	10	20	10
East Anglia	30	10	10
North-West Thames	20	30	10
North-East Thames	20	40	30
South-East Thames	10	10	10
South-West Thames	10	20	20
Wessex	10	10	0
Oxford	0	10	0
South Western	20	40	10
West Midlands	40	30	20
Mersey	0	0	0
North Western	10	30	10
Special Health Authorities	0	0	0

Vacant post figures for house officers are not collected.
Figures are rounded to the nearest 10, therefore individual grades may not add up to the total.

Supervision Registers (Records)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what form his Department holds records on the number of people who have been placed on supervision registers. [7996]

Mr. Bowis: Supervision registers are maintained by mental health service providers. Entries on the register form part of the patient's confidential health records.

Homoeopathic Medicines

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review the ban on certain homoeopathic medicines with particular reference to comfrey podophyllum and secalecornutum. [8206]

Mr. Malone: There is no ban on homoeopathic medicinal products containing comfrey or secalecornutum.

In the case of products containing podophyllum, manufacturers were asked to withdraw these products from the market in 1991. This followed advice from the Committee on Safety of Medicines and the Committee on the Review of Medicines that podophyllum appears to have unacceptable toxicity and little evidence of efficacy. The risk-benefit analysis for such products is not considered to be acceptable for use in any strength, for any indications. There was particular concern over the oral use of mutagenic chemicals such as podophyllum even at very low doses.

Residential Care for the Elderly

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the additional costs to local authorities in providing residential care for the elderly as a result of the raising of capital allowances in the Budget. [8160]

Mr. Bowis: Additional resources of £60 million have been made available for 1996–97 to reflect the additional cost to the Department of Social Security and social services departments in the United Kingdom of the changes announced in the Budget to levels of capital disregard.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all qualitative and quantitative research projects and surveys carried out for his Department into aspects of public attitudes and opinions *(a)* in general and *(b)* in relation to specific policy proposals in each of the past three years to December 1995, indicating for each project or survey (i) the date on which the research was commissioned, (ii) the amount which his Department spent, (iii) who carried out the research, (iv) the number of people surveyed or taking part, (v) the location and timescale and (vi) which individuals and organisations have been given access to the findings. [5985]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* An updated list of research projects, carried out by the Department for financial years 1992–93 to 1995–96 has been placed in the Library. The cost of each individual survey is a matter of commercial confidentiality and the remaining information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Total costs of surveys in each complete year since 1992–93 are estimated as follows:

1992–93: £ 5.5 million
1993–94: £ 6.7 million
1994–95: £ 5.3 million.

Alcohol

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the maximum recommended weekly levels of alcohol consumption for each country in Europe. [7218]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* The only Government-endorsed recommendations of which we are aware are shown in the table.

Number of units (UK equivalent[1])

	Men	*Women*
Austria	26.25	17.5
Denmark	31.5	21
Sweden	<6.25	<6.25

[1] 8g of ethanol.

TREASURY

Expenditure

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what were the levels of spending, predicted a year previously, for each Department and for government overall, in each year from 1990 to 1995; [6881]

(2) what the predicted figures for public spending, by Department and overall, in 1996 would be if the average error in past predictions for *(a)* 1992 to 1995 and *(b)* 1990 to 1995, were added to the current prediction; [6883]

(3) what was the average overshoot or undershoot for actual spending for each Department and overall in relation to the predictions a year earlier for the years *(a)* 1990 to 1995 and *(b)* 1992 to 1995. [6882]

Mr. Waldergrave: Tables 1 and 2 set out the information required. The figures have been adjusted to present control total definition and departmental structure. The outturn for 1994–95 is still provisional and is consistent with the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1996–97" published in November 1995.

The difference between planned expenditure and final outturn varies considerably from year to year. It would not therefore be meaningful to predict outturn for 1996–97 on the basis of averages over the last few years.

Table 1: Level of provision set for each department in public expenditure survey of previous year

(adjusted for classification and transfer changes)

	£'s million				
	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Defence	21,100	22,670	23,310	22,740	22,770
Overseas Development	1,710	1,910	2,150	2,270	2,310
Foreign Office	920	1,050	1,060	1,100	1,130

Table 1: Level of provision set for each department in public expenditure survey of previous year (adjusted for classification and transfer changes)

	£'s million				
	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	1,800	2,220	2,230	2,720	2,800
Trade and Industry	3,400	4,490	3,830	4,590	3,380
ECGD	250	250	120	–30	–90
Transport	4,210	5,200	6,930	6,460	5,820
Environment	28,630	37,470	40,700	39,450	39,870
Home Office	4,640	5,180	5,760	6,040	6,260
Legal Departments	1,890	2,030	1,860	2,840	2,990
Education and Employment	8,900	9,000	9,930	12,620	13,740
National Heritage	780	880	960	990	970
Health	22,120	24,860	27,730	29,860	31,690
Social Security	48,450	52,610	59,930	65,180	68,910
Scotland	9,640	11,120	12,560	13,540	14,210
Wales	4,470	4,940	5,810	6,330	6,650
Northern Ireland	5,610	6,050	6,600	6,930	7,390
Chancellor's Department	3,440	3,790	3,660	3,450	3,500
European Communities	1,870	1,050	2,460	1,410	1,350
Cabinet Office	270	260	1,000	1,090	970
Department total	174,100	197,030	218,590	229,580	236,620
LASFE	n/a	10,980	10,190	11,130	10,980
Reserve	3,000	3,500	4,000	4,000	3,500
Control total	177,100	211,530	232,770	244,680	251,100

Figures rounded to nearest £10 million.

Table 2: Average outturn compared with provision

	£ million	
	1990–91 to 1994–95	*1992–93 to 1994–95*
Defence	50	–200
Overseas Development	30	10
Foreign Office	130	180
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	20	–70
Trade and Industry	180	–80
ECGD	30	20
Transport	0	–210
Environment	270	230
Home Office	100	0
Legal Departments	–20	–120
Education and Employment	90	60
National Heritage	10	10
Health	270	110
Social Security	1,780	2,030
Scotland	130	0
Wales	80	20
Northern Ireland	10	60
Chancellor's Department	–130	–120
European Communities	80	200
Cabinet Office	0	–10
Departmental total	3,110	2,120
LASFE	–80	–140
Use of reserve	–3,600	–3,830
Control total	–570	–1,880

Figures rounded to nearest £10 million.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the predictions for the public sector borrowing requirement in the years 1990 to 1995 made in the previous year. [6899]

Mr. Jack: The table sets out the information requested.

Year	*Forecast made in:*	*PSBR £ billion*
1989–90	March 1989	–13.8
1990–91	March 1990	–6.9
1991–92	March 1991	7.9
1992–93	March 1992	28.1
1993–94	March 1993	50.1
1994–95	November 1994	37.9
1995–96	November 1995	21.5

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the predicted figure for the public sector borrowing requirement in 1996 would be, if the average error in past predictions for *(a)* 1992 to 1995 and *(b)* 1990 to 1995, were added to it. [6901]

Mr. Jack: The Budget forecast for the PSBR in 1996–97 was £22.4 billion. The absolute average error on PSBR forecasts, made in the autumn of the previous year, for both the four-year period 1991–92 to 1994–95 and the six-year period 1989–90 to 1994–95, was equivalent to 1¼ per cent. of gross domestic product, or £10 billion.

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average overshoot or undershoot for the

outturn public sector borrowing requirement in relation to the prediction a year earlier for 1990 to 1995. [6900]

Mr. Jack: The table compares the outturns for the PSBR for the period 1989–90 to 1994–95 with the forecasts made in the Budget in the previous year.

PSBR £ billion[1]

Year	*Budget forecast*	*Outturn*
1989–90	–13.8	–0.8
1990–91	–6.9	–0.6
1991–92	7.9	13.8
1992–93	28.1	36.3
1993–94	50.1	45.4
1994–95	37.9	35.9

For 1989–90 to 1993–94, forecasts were made in the previous March. For 1994–95, forecasts were made in November 1993.

Bank of England (Meetings)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to stop the publication of the discussion of his monthly interviews with the Governor of the Bank of England. [7414]

Mrs. Angela Knight: My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has no plans to stop publication of the minutes of monthly monetary meetings. The next set of minutes will be published on 31 January.

Tax Receipts

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average overshoot or undershoot for actual tax receipts in relation to the predictions a year earlier for 1990 to 1995 and 1992 to 1995. [6902]

Mr. Jack: The table compares the outturns for tax receipts for the period 1989–90 to 1994–95 with the forecast made in the Budget the previous year.

Tax receipts £ billion

Year	*Budget forecast*	*Outturn*
1989–90	190.9	191.5
1990–91	194.9	205.8
1991–92	204.3	211.6
1992–93	216.5	208.7
1993–94	213.8	217.0
1994–95	236.2	236.8

For 1989–90 to 1993–94, forecasts were made in the previous March. For 1994–95, forecasts were made in November 1993.

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the predictions for total tax receipts in 1990 to 1995 made in the previous year. [6903]

Mr. Jack: The table sets out the information requested.

Table 1: Forecasts for Tax Receipts[1]

Year	*Forecasts made in:*	*Tax receipts £ billion*
1989–90	March 1989	190.0
1990–91	March 1990	194.9
1991–92	March 1991	204.3
1992–93	March 1992	216.5
1993–94	March 1993	213.8
1994–95	November 1994	236.2
1995–96	November 1995	260.9

[1] Total tax and royalty receipts, social security contributions and council tax.

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the total tax receipts, for each year, from 1990 to 1995. [6947]

Mr. Jack: The table sets out the information requested.[1]

Year	*Tax receipts (£ billion)*
1989–90	191.5
1990–91	205.8
1991–92	211.6
1992–93	208.7
1993–94	217.0
1994–95	236.8
1995–96	[2]254.2

[1] Total tax and royalty receipts, social security contributions and council tax.

[2] Latest forecast.

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the predicted total for tax receipts in 1996 would be if the average error in past predictions for *(a)* 1992 to 1995 and *(b)* 1990 to 1995 were added. [6914]

Mr. Jack: The Budget forecast for tax receipts in 1996–97 was £268.7 billion. The absolute average error on tax forecasts, made in the autumn of the previous year, for both the four-year period 1991–92 to 1994–95 and the six-year period 1989–90 to 1994–95 was equivalent to ¾ per cent. of GDP, or £5 billion and £6 billion respectively.

Mr. Booth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library figures showing *(a)* receipts of income tax annually since 1979 and *(b)* the changes in the rates in each such year. [6744]

Mr. Jack: Income tax receipts can be found in table 1.2 of "Inland Revenue Statistics 1995". Income tax rates can be found in table A of the 1995 edition of the Taxes Acts. Copies of these publications are available in the Library.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total amount of income received by the Exchequer from income tax in each of the last four years for which figures are available at current prices. [7558]

Mr. Jack: Receipts of income tax can be found in table 1.2 of "Inland Revenue Statistics 1995", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Wages

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what was the median wage in the United Kingdom in each year from 1979 to 1995: [6907]

(2) what was the percentage change for the average wage of each income decile, on the previous year, for the years 1979 to 1995 in *(a)* absolute terms and *(b)* real terms; [6905]

(3) what was the average wage for each income decile in the United Kingdom, in each year from 1979 to 1995; [6908]

(4) what was the average wage in the United Kingdom in each year from 1979 to 1995. [6906]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Information on the mean, median, lowest decile, and highest decile of gross weekly earnings for full-time adult workers in Great Britain for 1983 to 1995 can be found in table 17 of part A of the new earnings survey for 1993 and 1995.

Full-time adult figures are not available for the years 1979 to 1982. Part B, table 30 shows the mean, median, lowest decile, and highest decile of gross weekly earnings, but for full-time males and full-time females separately.

Absolutely percentage change can be calculated directly from the tables. Real percentage change can be calculated using the retail prices index (all items). This information is published in the Central Statistical Office *Business Monitor MM23.*

Copies of these reports are available in the Library.

I will write to the hon. Member with the information for each of the remaining deciles, and place a copy in the Library.

Taxation (Reliefs and Allowances)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of taxpayers with income tax reliefs and allowances in excess of *(a)* £7,000, *(b)* £8,000, *(c)* £9,000, *(d)* £10,000, *(e)* £11,000 and *(f)* £12,000, (i) including and (ii) profits related pay. [7065]

Mr. Jack: The number of taxpayers with income tax reliefs and allowances in excess of the specified limits at 1996–97 income levels is in the table. Detailed information is not available to provide estimates taking account of profit-related pay.

Upper limit for total allowances and reliefs[1] £	*Number of taxpayers Thousands*
7,000	610
8,000	380
9,000	260
10,000	190
11,000	150
12,000	120

[1] Including only allowances and reliefs given at marginal rates.

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what change took place in his growth forecast for 1995 between 28 November and 13 December and what are the implications for the growth forecast for 1996; and what changes he plans to make to that forecast; [7428]

(2) if he will list the growth differences for 1995 between *(a)* the Budget forecast and *(b)* evidence given to the Treasury and Civil Service Committee as a plus or minus effect on output in cash terms. [7632]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Government's forecasts for GDP growth in 1995 and 1996 are set out in table 3.8 of the 1996–97 "Financial Statement and Budget Report". The Government publish only two forecasts a year—the Budget forecast and the summer economic forecast, which is normally published in late June.

An increase in GDP of $2\frac{1}{2}$ to $2\frac{3}{4}$ per cent. in 1995 would be broadly in line with the economy's trend growth rate, and would represent a continuation of sustainable recovery.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his present growth estimate for 1995 and for 1996; and what were the equivalent forecasts produced by each member of the panel of independent forecasters. [7429]

Mrs. Knight: The Budget forecast of GDP growth in 1995 is $2\frac{3}{4}$ per cent. As shown in table 3B.5 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report". Five of the six panel members also forecast $2\frac{3}{4}$ per cent. The sixth forecasts 2.6 per cent. The Budget forecast for growth in 1996 is 3 per cent. Four panel members forecast growth of 2.5 per cent. next year, one forecasts 2.9 per cent., and one 3.1 per cent.

Internet

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what web site his Department maintains on the Internet; what information is provided there; how often it is updated; what is the address; and if he or his Department answers questions and supplies additional information through the Internet. [7577]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Treasury maintains its own web site on the Internet. The site provides an extensive range of information including the Budget statement and all the Budget news releases, Treasury news releases, speeches, minutes of the monthly monetary meetings with the Governor of the Bank of England, reports of the panel of independent forecasters and various other publications.

Material is added to the site on a daily basis and there is a continuing programme to add more services.

The Treasury's system can be accessed directly using any one of the addresses set out in the table. In addition, users can find the Treasury pages through either on the Government world wide web server—http://www.open.gov.uk—or the server of the Central Office of Information—http://www.coi.gov.uk/coi.

The addresses are:

E-mail file transfer: ftpmail@hm-treasury.gov.uk

File transfer (FTP): ftp.hm-treasury.gov.uk

World wide web: http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk

Questions are received by Internet e-mail. These are answered electronically or by conventional means, depending on the nature of the inquiry. All information currently supplied through the Internet is available in hard

copy. From next year, a number of charts of publicly available economic data will be available through the Internet service, but will not be published separately.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total amount of money given by Her Majesty's Government to fund local authorities in the last year for which figures are available at current prices; and if he will list the amounts by Department. [7561]

Mr. Waldegrave: A departmental split for central Government support to local authorities is available in table 4.4 of the statistical supplement to the FSBR, Cm 2821.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many mobile telephones have been supplied to his Department in each of the last eight years; and in each of those years how many different suppliers were involved. [8031]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The total number of mobile telephones purchased by HM Treasury during the last five financial years is as follows:

1991–92: 08

1992–93: 10

1993–94: 09

1994–95: 13

1995–96: 09 (to date).

Each mobile telephone was provided by the same supplier. Information concerning the preceding three years is unavailable.

Executive Agencies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if answers sent to hon. Members in reply to parliamentary questions by the head of executive agencies in his Department are *(a)* seen, *(b)* approved and *(c)* amended by him before they are sent; and if he will identify such letters to which amendments by him have been made in 1994–95. [7828]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The letters to which the chief executives of the executive agencies responsible to the Chancellor of the Exchequer have sent to hon. Members in response to parliamentary questions were not shown to Treasury Ministers in advance.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measurements he proposes to make of the expected efficiency gains to be provided to the public sector by private sector consortia participating in the private finance initiative; and if these efficiency gains will be required to extend beyond reductions in staff members. [2823]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* As with all Government procurement, what is sought in private finance projects is the best possible value for money. This is the optimum combination of whole life costs and benefits and involves assessment of efficiency, effectiveness and economy. The staffing levels of private sector contractors are a matter for them. A full explanation of the value for money improvements stemming from the use of private finance is set out in the booklet "Private Opportunity, Public Benefit", a copy of which has been placed in the Library. An example of the benefits to the public of this approach is that the level of reliability for the new Northern line train service is set at four times better than the best fleet currently running on London Underground.

Living Standards

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in which year *(a)* average living standards and *(b)* the living standards of each decile of high to low income population will double, taking 1965 as a base and assuming that current economic trends continue. [5868]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The Government do not make forecasts of living standards but, if the trend growth rate assumed in the projections in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" were to continue, GDP would double by 2025.

Value Added Tax

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the number of firms which *(a)* registered and *(b)* deregistered for VAT each year since 1979 in each parliamentary constituency. [7553]

Mr. Page: I have been asked to reply.

There are no available figures on the number of VAT registrations and deregistrations by parliamentary constituency. Annual estimates of registrations and deregistrations for local authority districts are published in "VAT Registration and Deregistrations, County and District Analyses 1980–1991" and "VAT Registrations and Deregistrations, County and District Analyses 1992–93". Copies of these are in the Library of the House.

The estimates include adjustments for the effects of the changes in the VAT threshold in 1991 and 1993, and hence differ from those published elsewhere by HM Customs and Excise.

Family Expenditure Surveys

Ms Corston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the reasons for non-response in respect of the annual reports of the family expenditure surveys from 1965 to 1994–95. [6797]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The following reports were both commissioned and evaluated by the Central Statistical Office.

1. Kempsey, W. F. F. (1975) "Family Expenditure Survey. A study of differential response based on a comparison of the 1971 sample with the Census" Statistical News, no. 31, pp. 3–8.
2. Redpath, R. (1986) "Family Expenditure Survey; a second study of differential response, comparing Census characteristics of FES respondents and non-respondents" Statistical News, no. 72, pp. 13–16.
3. Foster, K. (1995) "A comparison of the Census characteristics of respondents and non-respondents to the 1991 Family Expenditure survey" to be published January 1996, OPCS Survey Methodology Bulletin, no. 38.

Employees

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of *(a)* part-time employees, *(b)* full-time employees, *(c)* all employees, have been with their current employer for (i) less than one year, (ii) one to two years, (iii) two to five years, (iv) five to 10 years, (v) 10 to 20 years and (vi) over 20 years in each year from 1992 to 1995. [6912]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The requested information is shown in the following table.

Employees in Great Britain: at summer (per cent.)[1]

	[2]All	Full-time	Part-time
Less than one year			
1992	17	11	6
1993	17	11	6
1994	18	12	6
1995	20	13	7
One but less than two years			
1992	11	8	3
1993	10	7	3
1994	10	7	3
1995	11	7	3
Two but less than five years			
1992	26	20	6
1993	24	18	6
1994	22	16	6
1995	19	14	5
Five but less than ten years			
1992	20	16	4
1993	20	15	4
1994	21	16	4
1995	22	17	5
Ten but less than twenty years			
1992	18	15	3
1993	19	15	4
1994	19	15	3
1995	18	15	3
Twenty years and over			
1992	9	8	1
1993	10	9	1
1994	11	9	1
1995	10	9	1

Notes:
[1] Not seasonally adjusted.
[2] The total of all employees may not equal the sum of full and part-time due to rounding. Also, the total of all employees within each category for a given year may not equal 100 per cent. due to rounding.
Source:
Labour Force Survey, CSO.

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the number of employees in employment in each quarter from 1992 to 1995 in *(a)* absolute terms and *(b)* as a percentage of the work force. [6911]

Mrs. Knight: The information requested is shown in the table.

Employees in Great Britain (thousands)[1]

	Level (thousands)	Per cent. of workforce[2]
1992		
Spring	21,582	77
Summer	21,470	77
Autumn	21,434	77
Winter	21,396	77
1993		
Spring	21,375	77
Summer	21,362	77
Autumn	21,394	77
Winter	21,436	77
1994		
Spring	21,477	77
Summer	21,554	77
Autumn	21,585	78
Winter	21,687	78
1995		
Spring	21,746	78
Summer	21,887	78

Notes:
[1] Seasonally adjusted.
[2] Total persons economically active.
Source:
Labour Force Survey, CSO.

Economically Inactive People

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what was the number of the work force classified as economically inactive, for each quarter from 1992 to 1995 in *(a)* absolute terms and *(b)* as a percentage of the work force; [6909]

(2) what is the Government's definition of economically inactive. [6884]

Mrs. Angela Knight: In brief, an economically inactive person is defined to be a person aged 16 or over who is neither in employment nor unemployed according to the International Labour Organisation definitions. Fuller details are given on page 49 of the labour force survey quarterly bulletin, issue No. 14, copies of which are held in the Library. Estimates from the labour force survey of the number and proportion of economically inactive people of working age are shown in the table.

Economically inactive people (Great Britain, not seasonally adjusted)

	Number of economically inactive people of working age (000s)	Economic inactivity rate[1] (percentage)
Spring 1992	7,183	21.0
Summer 1992	6,954	20.3
Autumn 1992	7,101	20.7
Winter 1992–93	7,282	21.2
Spring 1993	7,326	21.4
Summer 1993	7,051	20.6
Autumn 1993	7,188	20.9
Winter 1993–94	7,396	21.5
Spring 1994	7,393	21.5
Summer 1994	7,071	20.6
Autumn 1994	7,314	21.3
Winter 1994–95	7,555	21.9
Spring 1995	7,510	21.8
Summer 1995	7,138	20.7

[1] Economically inactive people as a percentage of total population of working age (men aged 16–64 and women aged 16–59).

Single Currency

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Government reported on the legislative changes required to ensure that the single currency could be used on the same basis as national currencies in phase B of the European monetary union as required by the Commission's green paper; and if he will place a copy of the report in the Library. [7241]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The green paper published by the Commission in May 1995 was intended to stimulate discussion of the practical arrangements for the possible introduction of a single currency. Its provisions do not impose legally binding requirements on any member state. The Council of Ministers did not endorse its contents. The Government have no plans to report to the Commission on the legislative measures that would be required at a national level for the possible introduction of a single currency.

Under protocol 11 of the EC treaty, the United Kingdom shall not be obliged or committed to move to the third stage of economic and monetary union without a separate decision to do so by the Government and Parliament. We will agree to take part in a single currency only if it is in our national interest to do so, given the circumstances at the time.

Personal Equity Plans

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of PEP holders with total PEP investment in excess of *(a)* £20,000, *(b)* £30,000, *(c)* £40,000, *(d)* £50,000 and *(e)* £70,000, giving in each case an estimate of the cost of (i) income and (ii) capital gains tax relief in a full year on those investments. [7066]

Mr. Jack: Total tax relief for personal equity plans is provisionally estimated at £425 million for 1995–96, comprising £275 million of income tax relief and some £150 million of capital gains tax relief.

I regret that the distributions of number of investors and cost of tax relief by size of total PEP investment are not available.

Interest Rates

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what account was taken of growth forecast for *(a)* 1995 and *(b)* 1996 in determining the latest reduction in United Kingdom interest rates in his discussions with the Governor of the Bank of England. [7726]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Interest rate decisions are not based solely on any one indicator but are based on an overall assessment of all the relevant information concerning the prospects for inflation. As the framework is forward-looking, monetary policy responds to changes in cost and demand pressures which alter the outlook for inflation.

As usual, the minutes of the discussion at the 13 December meeting will be published in due course.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he has made of the effect of a reduction on interest rates of one quarter of 1 per cent. on economic growth in *(a)* 1995 and *(b)* 1996; [7416]

(2) what assumptions he made as to interest rates in making his growth forecast for 1996. [7415]

Mrs. Knight: The Government do not disclose the interest rate assumptions that underlie their forecasts, which are not based on any particular pattern of interest rates. Interest rates are only one of many influences on economic growth.

Disposable Incomes

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the change in real disposable incomes each year since 1981 together with his estimate of next year's change. [7413]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Information on real personal disposable income is published annually in the Central Statistical Office Blue Book, quarterly in the CSO press notice quarterly national accounts and is held on the CSO data base; all sources are available in the Library. The latest estimates of percentage changes in real personal disposable income since 1981 are as follows:

1981: –0.8
1982: –0.5
1983: 2.7
1984: 3.6
1985: 3.4
1986: 4.5
1987: 3.4
1988: 6.0
1989: 4.8
1990: 1.8
1991: –0.1
1992: 2.3
1993: 1.6
1994: 0.7.

The budget forecast for growth in real personal disposable income was 2 per cent. in 1995 and 2¼ per cent. in 1996.

Income Tax (Over-65s)

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated number and proportion of people aged 65 years or over who will be liable to pay income tax in 1996–97 at *(a)* 20 per cent. only, *(b)* 24 per cent. and *(c)* 40 per cent. rates. [7647]

Mr. Jack: Latest estimates for 1996–97 are given in the table.

Taxpayers aged 65 or over liable at

	Number (millions)	*Percentage*
Lower rate only	1.35	45
Basic rate but not higher rate	1.50	50
Higher rate	0.15	5
All	3.0	100

Labour Statistics (Wirral)

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many adults work in the Wirral for *(a)* more than 40 hours a week, *(b)* for between 20 and 39 hours and *(c)* less than 20 hours a week. [7638]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Estimates of hours worked by local authority district are available only from the census of population for April 1991. The information relates to residents aged 16 and over in Wirral local authority district:

(a) over 40 hours—16,100 (13.1 per cent.)

(b) 22 to 40 hours—87,100 (70.6 per cent.)

(c) under 22 hours—20,150 (16.3 per cent.).

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what legislation from his Department passed in the last five years contains provision for statutory repeal or review. [2032]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 27 November 1995]:* The annual Finance Bill allows Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise to review, on a regular basis, whether any published piece of tax legislation is still needed. Both departments are committed to review, over a number of years, all the major taxes and duties. This approach, and progress achieved were set out in some detail in "Deregulation—Cutting Red Tape" published in January 1994, updated in "Deregulation—The Way Forward" published in May this year: both are available in the Library.

Customs and Excise is responsible for two items which fall for review or statutory repeal. The first concerns Intrastat legislation—Intrastat is an EC system for capturing intra-EC trade statistics, which was introduced on 1 January 1993 when customs documentation for this traffic was abolished. This legislation contains a review clause. Treasury orders designating "Free Zones" contain a 10-year period of validity. Free zones are enclosed areas in which non-European Community goods are treated for the purposes of import duties as outside the customs territory of the Community. Customs duty, import VAT or other import charges are not due provided the goods are not released for free circulation.

In addition, major reviews of legislation have been carried out by the Treasury. Those on building societies and credit unions, for example have led to a significant number of deregulatory proposals, some of which are being brought into effect through the use of section 1 of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994.

Inland Revenue

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the procedures by which his Department monitors the performance of personnel of the rank of district inspector and above in the Inland Revenue; and if he will make a statement. [6016]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* The performance of all staff in the Inland Revenue up to and including band A1 level—grade 4 in civil service terms—is monitored through the Department's performance management scheme. District inspectors are in either band A or band B. Above that level, the performance of senior staff in the senior open structure is monitored through the civil service-wide performance review system. Under both systems, an annual assessment of all aspects of performance is made.

Privatisation Proceeds

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what have been the receipts from privatisation in each year since 1980. [6246]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* The information requested is included in the table:

Privatisation proceeds

	£ billion
1979–80	0.4
1980–81	0.2
1981–82	0.5
1982–83	0.5
1983–84	1.1
1984–95	2.1
1985–86	2.7
1986–87	4.5
1987–88	5.1
1988–89	7.1
1989–90	4.2
1990–91	5.3
1991–92	7.9
1992–93	8.2
1993–94	5.4
1994–95	6.4

National Insurance

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been paid in employers' national insurance contributions in constant terms by the construction industry in each of the last 10 years. [8322]

Mr. Heald: I have been asked to reply.

The available information is in the table.

Amount of employers' National Insurance contributions paid by the construction industry[1] in the UK in each of the last 10 years in constant (1993–94) terms[2]

Year	*Amount (£ million)*
1985–86	1,236
1986–87	1,222
1987–88	1,195
1988–89	1,293
1989–90	Not available[3]
1990–91	1,487
1991–92	1,246
1992–93	1,119
1993–94	1,057
1994–95	Figures not yet available

Notes:

[1] Based on the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC 1980) and the pay point covered by the P.A.Y.E. scheme.

[2] Using the average earnings index (unadjusted) averaged over each financial year.

[3] Not available due to changes in the structure of contribution rates from October 1989.

Source:

One per cent. sample of P.A.Y.E. documents returned by employers.

DEFENCE

NATO

7. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the Government's policy on the enlargement of NATO. [6344]

Mr. Soames: The Government support enlargement of NATO and are playing an important role in enhancing the stability and security of the whole of Europe.

Nuclear Proliferation

8. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his current assessment of the threat posed by nuclear proliferation. [6345]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The threat posed by potential nuclear proliferation remains a serious one and the Government continue to make strenuous efforts to prevent such proliferation.

Intergovernmental Conference

14. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with European counterparts about defence matters in respect of the forthcoming intergovernmental conference. [6353]

Mr. Soames: Defence Ministers regularly discuss defence aspects of the forthcoming intergovernmental conference with their European counterparts. The Government's position was set out by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 1 March 1995.

Spending Reductions

15. **Mr. Dover:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received on the effect on the deterrent capability of United Kingdom forces of reducing spending on defence to the European average. [6354]

Mr. Soames: Reducing defence expenditure to the current NATO European average of 2.5 per cent. of GDP would result in cuts of as much as £4 billion per year. Such a dramatic reduction would drastically undermine the capabilities of the armed forces.

Financial Waste

16. **Mr. Clelland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what records he maintains in respect of financial waste in his Department. [6355]

25. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the level of financial waste in his Department. [6365]

Mr. Arbuthnot: My Department puts the front line first. To achieve this, we deliver significant year-on-year efficiency improvements. We are determined to bear down on waste wherever it occurs.

Bosnia

17. **Mr. Gale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on NATO's peace implementation force in Bosnia. [6356]

Mr. Soames: The deployment of the NATO-led peace implementation force is continuing with over 34,000 troops now in theatre, including some 8,500 UK personnel. IFOR has monitored compliance with the first stages of the peace agreement and we expect the implementation process to continue with the full support of the parties.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the total cost of the British defence presence in Bosnia; what proportion of this cost has been met from international bodies; and if he will list the bodies involved. [6754]

Mr. Soames: The total cost of the British defence presence in Bosnia to date is £377 million. Of this, £292 million has been incurred on United Nations operations and, in accordance with well-established arrangements, my Department recovers these costs from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which in turn seeks reimbursement from the UN. The latter has so far reimbursed £85 million and further reimbursements are expected. An additional £86 million associated with NATO-Western European Union operations, for which there is no reimbursement, has fallen on Defence votes.

Personnel (Middle East)

18. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the number of United Kingdom personnel belonging to the armed forces stationed in the middle east. [6357]

Mr. Soames: As of 1 July 1995, there were some 1,364 UK armed forces personnel stationed in the middle east region. This figure includes those deployed on operations—such as the Armilla patrol—loan service personnel and personnel attached to embassies.

Racial Harassment

19. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent studies have been undertaken by his Department on racial harassment in the armed forces. [6358]

Mr. Soames: Although no studies into racial harassment in the armed forces have been undertaken by my Department, it has been made clear throughout the services that racial harassment, abuse or discrimination of any sort will not be tolerated. Complaints of racial harassment or discrimination will be investigated and, if substantiated, appropriate action will be taken against the offenders.

Nuclear Test Ban Treaty

20. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the effect on international security of a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty. [6360]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Government believe that a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty would strengthen the international nuclear non-proliferation regime, and thereby contribute to international security. It is for this reason that Britain is actively negotiating to conclude an effective and verifiable CTBT commanding universal adherence as soon as practicable.

Nuclear Weapons

21. **Mr. Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what exchanges of United Kingdom and French personnel have taken place in relation to joint work on nuclear matters; and if he will make a statement. [6361]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I have nothing to add to the answer I gave the hon. Member on 16 October 1995, *Official Report*, column *37*.

Procurement

22. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration is given by his Department to export potential in determining product specification during the procurement process. [6362]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The consideration of export potential is an explicit requirement of my Department's project approval procedures. We also invite industry to offer adjustments to proposed equipment requirements in order to enhance export prospects, and will accept these where this can be done without unduly compromising MOD requirements or reducing overall value for money.

24. **Mr. Purchase:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of his Department's budget is due to procurement cost overruns and financial waste. [6364]

Mr. Arbuthnot: My Department has made substantial progress in improving value for money in the delivery of defence capability. Efficiency improvements worth more than £3 billion have been achieved since 1988. The latest description of this, including information illustrating MOD's performance in project control, is contained in the MOD performance report 1994–95, published on 19 December.

Beaufort's Dyke

23. **Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans his Department has to monitor the ammunition dump in Beaufort's dyke. [6363]

Mr. Soames: My Department has no plans to monitor the Beaufort's dyke explosive dumping ground. The Scottish Office agriculture, environment and fisheries department marine laboratory surveyed an area of the North channel, including part of Beaufort's dyke in November 1995 and an interim survey report was published yesterday, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

Corporal Lee Clegg

26. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what financial support his Department is giving to the legal costs of Corporal Lee Clegg. [6366]

Mr. Soames: My Department has provided financial support for the legal costs of Lance Corporal Clegg at his trial and subsequent appeals. The full costs are not yet known, but are likely to be several hundred thousand pounds. It would not be appropriate for my Department to provide further funds, in the absence of legal proceedings.

Mid-air Collisions

27. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will calculate the statistical probability of a mid-air collision involving fast jets on exercise over the next 12 months. [6367]

Mr. Soames: A study is being conducted by the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency to assess the probability of a random mid-air collision between various types of aircraft operating in the United Kingdom low flying system.

Royal Yacht

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what efficiency gains have been achieved in the running of the royal yacht since 1990. [7045]

Mr. Soames: The demands on Britannia vary from year to year, depending on the number and location of countries she is required to visit. Efficiency gains are therefore difficult to quantify precisely. There has, however, been an estimated reduction in running costs—excluding repairs and refits—of some 12.7 per cent. since 1990.

Gulf War

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the auxiliary services served in the Gulf war; and if he will list the number of personnel and their unit. [7680]

Mr. Soames: A total of 1,774 reservists were called out or recalled in support of the Gulf conflict. Of these, 877 were members of the volunteer reserve forces and 897 had a liability for call-out or recall as a result of previous regular service. They served, among others, with medical, movements, intelligence and military police units and in public relations posts. In addition, members of the Territorial Army undertook short periods of service as members of the Regular Army in the Gulf or in support of operations: they served, again among others, in infantry and transport units.

A full list of the units concerned, and the number of reserve personnel who served with each, could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what inquiries he has instituted into the recent allegations made by service men who served in the Gulf war that chemical weapons were used by Iraq. [7615]

Mr. Soames: No confirmed reports of the detection of chemical warfare agent have been received relating to the Gulf conflict.

Gulf War Syndrome

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the amount of each of the ingredients in the nerve agent pre-treatment tablet set L1A1 given to Her Majesty's armed forces during the Gulf War. [7684]

Mr. Soames: The nerve agent pre-treatment set tablet L1A1 given to British troops during the Gulf war consisted of the following constituents:

Pyridostigmine bromide: 31.5mg (active constituent)

Pregelatinised starch: 56.8 mg

Maize starch: 35.0mg

Lactose: 27.5mg

Colloidal silicon dioxide: 25.5mg

Talc: 3.5mg

Magnesium stearate: 0.25mg.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his current policy in respect of the recognition of Gulf war syndrome. [7731]

Mr. Soames: The MOD recognises that some individual Gulf veterans have become ill and keeps an open mind on any possible link to Gulf service. However, the most extensive and detailed investigations, in this country and other Gulf coalition countries, have so far found no medical or scientific evidence to date to suggest the existence of a unique medical condition or syndrome. The Royal College of Physicians gave broad endorsement to our work in July 1995 and recommended that expert advice be sought on the possible direction of future research. We are currently following this up.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the known side effects of the inoculations given to Her Majesty's forces prior to and during the Gulf war. [7681]

Mr. Soames: The only known side effects are short term and commonly occur after the administration of any vaccine or combination of vaccines. These side effects can include soreness or swelling at injection site and possible nausea. Severe reactions, such as anaphylactic shock, are extremely rare.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many nerve agent pre-treatment tablets set L1A1 each Her Majesty's forces personnel were instructed to take each day during the Gulf war. [7682]

Mr. Soames: During the periods when there was an assessed threat of possible chemical agent attack, orders were given for British troops in the Gulf theatre of operations to take nerve agent pre-treatment set tablets in accordance with the recommended dose, which is one 30mg NAPS tablet taken every eight hours.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the side effects of the ingredients in the nerve agent pre-treatment tablet set L1A1. [7683]

Mr. Soames: It is well recognised that the active constituent of the nerve agent pre-treatment set pyridostigmine bromide, can have minor short-term side effects on a minority of those taking the drug. These include sweating, excess salivation, abdominal pains and diarrhoea. The side effects cease when the tablets are stopped and there is no record of long-term adverse effects resulting from the drug.

Contractors

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* full-time contractors and *(b)* other civilians were employed (i) at November 1990 and (ii) at the latest available date at (1) Castlemartin range, (2) Llanorbrier range, (3) Penally range, (4) RAF Brawdy, (5) RNAD Milford Haven, (6) RNAD Trecwn, (7) P and EE Pendine and (8) Pembroke dock mooring and salvage depot. [7732]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information requested is not available. Such information as is available is detailed in the table.

Location	*As at July 1990*		*As at November 1995*	
	Contractor staff	*Other civilians*	*Contractor staff*	*Other civilians*
Castlemartin	0	70	0	50
Llanorbrier	N/K	8	N/K	10
Penally	0	8	0	8
RAF Brawdy	N/K	166	N/K	33
RNAD Milford Haven	N/K	161	N/K	6
RNAD Trecwn	N/K	381	[1]12	3
P and EE Pendine	N/K	60	121	17
Pembroke Dock	[2]3	129	21	80

[1] July figure.

[2] November figure.

Redundant Equipment

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what new proposals he has to increase the receipts from the sale of redundant equipment. [7818]

Mr. Arbuthnot: These matters are the responsibility of the chief executive of the Disposal Sales Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Keith Ellender to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 9 January 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me, as Chief Executive of the Disposal Sales Agency, to reply to your question asking what new proposals he has to increase the receipts from the sale of redundant equipment.

My Agency's Framework Document (a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House) together with the in-year targets (Official Record col 1197, of 20 December 1994 and col 1349, of 19 July 1995) set out the strategy and achievements required by the Agency. New initiatives reside in greater industrial involvement in the disposal sales process, primarily through commercial storage and marketing agreements which operate on a profit sharing basis.

I hope you find this information useful.

Army Technical Support Agency

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the changes made to the site option investment appraisal figures for the collocation of the Army Technical Support Agency between the first draft of the figures and the figures currently being considered; [7976]

(2) what arrangements are being made to consult the trade unions and the personnel involved regarding the future of the Army Technical Support Agency drawing office/graphics support services if the ATSA is collocated at the Chertsey site; [7975]

(3) what account has been taken of the accommodation available at the Malvern site in deciding the location of the Army Technical Support Agency following collocation; [7973]

(4) what considerations led to *(a)* the omission of security and build costs for the collocation of the Army Technical Support Agency at the Chertsey site from the site option appraisal figures and *(b)* the inclusion of the clean-up costs for the Chertsey site; [7960]

(5) what factors were taken into account in deciding not to consult the trade unions on the original site option investment appraisals for the collocation of the Army Technical Support Agency; [7977]

(6) what will be the annual rent payable by the Army Technical Support Agency if it is collocated on the Chertsey site; [7963]

(7) what plans are being made for the future of the Ministry of Defence's student engineering training centre if the Army Technical Support Agency is collocated at Chertsey; [7971]

(8) if he will list the financial advantages of the collocation of the Army Technical Support Agency onto a leased site rather than onto a site owned by the Ministry of Defence; [7961]

(9) what account has been taken of the comparative travel and subsistence costs in assessing the long-term costings of the collocation of the Army Technical Support Agency at Malvern or Chertsey; [7979]

(10) if it remains the policy of the Government to move civil service posts from London to the provinces; and what account will be taken of this policy in deciding whether to collocate the Army Technical Support Agency at Chertsey; [7974]

(11) who is the main leaseholder of the Chertsey site proposed for the collocation of the Army Technical Support Agency; [8004]

(12) what assessment he has made of the effect of the closure of the Army Technical Support Agency at Malvern on the economy of Malvern and the surrounding area; and what plans the Government have to rejuvenate the local economy in the event of closure; [7978]

(13) what is the estimated realisation figure from the sale of the present site in Malvern of the Army Technical Support Agency; [7972]

(14) if the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency will be able to remain on its Chertsey site if the Army Technical Support Agency is collocated elsewhere. [7962]

Mr. Soames: These matters are the responsibility of the chief executive of the Army Technical Support Agency. I have asked him to reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from J. R. Prince to Mr. Nigel Jones, dated 5 January 1996:

COLLOCATION OF THE ARMY TECHNICAL SUPPORT AGENCY (ATSA)

You will recall that just before the Christmas break you raised a number of questions with the Hon. Nicholas Soames, MP, Minister Armed Forces on the subject of the collocation proposals in respect of the Army Technical Support Agency (ATSA). As the Chief Executive of the ATSA, I have been asked by the Minister to respond directly to you.

Please note that this letter is copied to the Minister.

I regret that I had been unaware of your interest in the ATSA and have not included you in the distribution of the consultative document on collocation. I attach, therefore, a copy of the consultative document and also copies of the Agency Framework Document and Corporate Plan.

The answers to your questions are as follows.

Question 1: What account has been taken of the accommodation available at the Malvern site in deciding the location of the ATSA following collocation?

Answer 1: All of the accommodation at the Malvern site was taken into account when deciding on the location of the ATSA following collocation.

Question 2: What arrangements are being made to consult the trade unions and the personnel involved regarding the future of the ATSA Drawing Office/Graphics Support Services if the ATSA is collocated at the Chertsey site?

Answer 2: A consultative document specifically addressing the future of ATSA Drawing Office/Graphics Support Services will be forwarded to the Council of Civil Service Unions shortly. Drawing Office and Graphics staff across the ATSA sites are an integral part of the Agency and are included in the ATSA collocation proposals.

Question 3: List the changes made to the site option investment appraisal figures for the collocation of the ATSA between the first draft of the figures and the figures currently being declared.

Answer 3: The drafting process is part of the normal management of any proposal, giving appropriate Departmental officials opportunity to contribute to the process. It is not Agency policy to make such drafts available for public consumption.

Question 4: If the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency will be able to remain on its Chertsey site if the ATSA is collocated elsewhere?

Answer 4: Chertsey is currently a viable site to operate, but the situation could change if a major unit vacates the site. The Chief Executive of DERA therefore takes the view that DERA would need to review its position at Chertsey should ATSA collocate elsewhere.

Question 5: What is the estimated realisation figure from the sale of the present site in Malvern of the ATSA?

Answer 5: I regret that land valuations are commercial in confidence.

Question 6: What assessment has been made of the effect of the closure of the ATSA at Malvern on the economy of Malvern and the surrounding area; and what plans the Government has to rejuvenate the local economy in the event of closure?

Answer 6: Whilst appreciating the local effect of withdrawal of the ATSA from Malvern and our other sites, it is my responsibility to consider the implications of collocation in Defence terms. For both budgetary and business reasons, the exhaustive appraisals carried out have indicated that the most appropriate site for collocation is Chertsey.

Question 7: Who is the main leaseholder of the Chertsey site proposed for the collocation of the ATSA?

Answer 7: The Chertsey site is wholly owned by the MOD and is vested in the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) Trading Fund.

Question 8: What account has been taken of the comparative travel and subsistence costs in assessing the long-term costings of the collocation of the ATSA at Malvern or Chertsey?

Answer 8: No account has been taken of the comparative travel and subsistence costs in assessing the long-term costings of the collocation of the ATSA at Malvern or Chertsey. However, by far the greatest majority of ATSAs customers are based at Andover and my judgement is that, from a travel and subsistence point of view, collocation at Malvern would be more expensive than collocation at Chertsey.

Question 9: List the financial advantages of the collocation of the ATSA onto a leased site rather than onto a site owned by the Ministry of Defence.

Answer 9: The Chertsey site is wholly owned by the MOD and is vested in the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) Trading Fund.

Question 10: Whether it remains the policy of the Government to move Civil Service posts from London to the provinces, and what account will be taken of this policy in deciding whether to collocate the ATSA at Chertsey?

Answer 10: Moves from London, or anywhere else for that matter, are only agreed if proven to be both cost effective and good business sense. The site selection for the ATSA has been based on the business needs and value for money for the MOD as a whole.

Question 11: What will be the annual rent payable by the ATSA if it is collocated on the Chertsey site?

Answer 11: The Chertsey site is wholly owned by the MOD. There is trading between the two Defence Agencies, but no rent is paid to organisations external to MOD.

Question 12: What plans are being made for the future of the Ministry of Defence's Student Engineering Training Centre if the ATSA is collocated at Chertsey?

Answer 12: The ATSA costings have made no assumption that the MOD Student Engineering Training Centre will vacate the site. In due course consideration will be given as to whether continued occupation makes both economic sense and best use of the Defence Estate, or whether there might be more appropriate locations.

Question 13: What factors were taken into account in deciding not to consult the trade unions on the original investment appraisals for the collocation of the ATSA?

Answer 13: The main part of the initial study concentrated principally on business and organisational aspects of the Army's Technical Branches and Authorities. It was recognised by Armed Forces Minister of the time (Jeremy Hanley) that much more detailed work would be necessary before a final decision could be taken and, in particular, more comprehensive investment appraisals were required into the rationalisation proposals. The trade unions, and other interested parties, were advised of the situation in August 1993.

Question 14: What consideration led to the omission of the security and build costs for the collocation of the ATSA at the Chertsey site from the site option appraisal figures and the inclusion of the clean-up costs for the Chertsey site?

Answer 14: The appraisal figures for the Chertsey site *included* security and build cost but *excluded* possible clean-up costs.

I hope the information given above satisfactorily answers the questions you have raised. Should you require any further information I will be pleased to answer any additional questions you may wish to raise.

Training

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total sum spent on training for each new recruit in *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the RAF and *(c)* the Navy in each of the past five years. [7619]

Mr. Soames: The type and amount of training given to new recruits varies between services and, indeed, between trades and specialisations within each service. The information requested in respect of the last five years is not, therefore, held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The costs of basic training for officers and other ranks for FY 1994–95 in each of the three services are, however, set out in the following details.

Royal Navy:

Basic Training (Officer): £24,924 per recruit (20 weeks)

Basic Training (Ratings): £6,534 per recruit (8 weeks).

Army:

Basic Training (Officer): £17,300 per recruit (42 weeks)

Basic Training (Soldier): £3,338 per recruit (10 weeks).

Royal Air Force:

Basic Training (Officer): £15,840 per recruit (24 weeks)

Basic Training (Airman): £3,056 per recruit (7 weeks).

These figures refer to the cost of training only and do not include such costs as recruits' pay, messing, accommodation and clothing.

Low Flying

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many low level flights took place in the midlands *(a)* in 1991 and *(b)* in the last year for which figures are available. [8209]

Mr. Soames: Although records are maintained of the total number of sorties flown in the UK low flying system, statistics are not available on, nor is it possible to estimate, the number of sorties flown over the midlands.

Mutual Defence Agreement

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a list of all papers released since 1988 by the Public Records Office that refer specifically to the 1958 US-UK mutual defence agreement. [8270]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Public Records Office.

Driffield Airfield

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what area of land at Driffield airfield, other than that announced as being for sale, his Department is considering selling. [8073]

Mr. Soames: The RAF technical/domestic site adjacent to Driffield airfield is due to be vacated by the RAF by June 1996 and will be declared surplus if no alternative Defence use is found. It is my Department's normal policy that surplus land should be sold on the open market to maximise the return to the taxpayer. Agents have been appointed to carry out a study into potential alternative uses for the technical/domestic site and to recommend a strategy for its disposal.

Stolen and Lost Property

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what calculation he has made of the value of property which has been stolen or lost in each of the past five

years in the *(a)* Army, *(b)* Royal Air Force and *(c)* Royal Navy. [7819]

Mr. Soames: Stores losses written off for all reasons in Army, Royal Air Force and Royal Navy budget areas were as follows:

£000

Year	*Army*	*RAF*	*RN*
1990–91	5,652	2,368	5,790
1991—92	7,711	4,493	6,448
1992–93	4,158	[1]11,612	5,147
1993–94	4,514	2,844	4,706
1994–95	[2]3,642	2,520	4,613

[1] This figure includes £9.25 million of stores and equipment destroyed by a fire at an RAF establishment for which two people were successfully prosecuted.

[2] This figure does not include Germany, for which returns are not yet available.

Figures could not be broken down into those solely applicable to theft or loss without disproportionate effort. Where, however, recovery is made in the same year as the loss is recorded, the figures are net of recovery.

White Vehicle Contracts

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make an announcement for the white vehicles contract for use in Germany; which companies have been invited to tender; what is the estimated value of the order; and what efforts are being made to maximise the British-built content in the order. [3444]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I expect to announce my decision on the outcome of the competition for the provision, management and maintenance of non-operational vehicles for the British forces in Germany early in the new year. After an expressions of interest campaign, six companies were sent an invitation to tender. These were:

ALD AutoLeasing D GmbH

Leaseplan Deutschland GmbH

Lombard Leasing GmbH

Mercedes Benz AG

PHH Europe plc

Ryder plc.

ALD AutoLeasing D GmbH withdrew during the tender period, while PHH Europe plc declined to tender but decided to act as a sub-contractor to Ryder plc. Consequently, tenders were received from Leaseplan Deutschland GmbH, Lombard Leasing GmbH—a member of the NatWest group—in a joint venture with Sixt AG, Mercedes Benz AG and Ryder plc/PHH Europe plc.

The procedures used in the market test followed the guidelines laid out in the "Guide to Competing for Quality in Defence Services". This meant that both the statement of requirement and the invitation to tender which were drawn up specified the level of service required but not how it was to be delivered. No pre-set level of British content was sought; indeed the vehicle industry tends to be multinational in nature and seemingly "British" vehicles may, in fact, contain a high level of components purchased from other countries.

The final decision on the market test has not yet been made and, given the need for commercial and contract confidentiality, it would be inappropriate to state what the estimated value of the contract will be. Finally, the criteria for the selection of the winning bid is based on best value for money, which includes technical and commercial competence, and tenders will be assessed accordingly.

Internet

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Defence what web site his Department maintains on the Internet; what information is provided there; how often it is updated; what is the address; and if he or his Department answers questions and supplies additional information through the Internet. [7564]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Ministry of Defence maintains an Internet world wide web site whose home page can be found at the Internet address www.mod.uk. Liaison with CCTA has ensured that the MOD home page is accessible via the Government information service WWW server at www.open.gov.uk.

Information made available includes MOD press releases, information about historic military buildings on the Defence estate, the UK MOD newsletter covering continuous acquisition and life-cycle support, summary biographies and pictures of MOD Ministers, recruitment information for the individual services, information on the Defence Intelligence Staff and Directorate General of Information and Communication Services, the Royal Corps of Signals and the Royal Navy in Plymouth. In addition, the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency has a number of web pages accessible from the MOD home page, which publicise topical items from the Defence research programme.

It is planned in the next six months to increase the number of MOD WWW pages to make further information available to the public, one example being the coverage of major defence policy speeches. The information presented is updated frequently as modifications are required.

The present address for e-mail inquiries is press office@dgics.mod.uk. This address is publicised on the MOD home page.

Future policy on the Internet is currently under review.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Penalty Parking Notices

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much has been raised by his Department over the last three years by fixed-penalty parking notices; and what has been the income derived from pay car parks over the same period. [7360]

Sir John Wheeler: The information sought on fixed penalty parking notices is not available in the format requested as financial records of moneys received by way of payments for fixed-penalty tickets do not differentiate on the basis of offence type. During the 1992–93, 1993–94 and 1994–95 financial years, £1.86 million, £1.78 million and £1.97 million respectively was collected in respect of all types of fixed-penalty tickets issued.

Income derived from pay car parks, including on-street car parking, was:

1992–93: £2.437 million

1993–94: £2.947 million

1994–95: £2.964 million.

Department of Education Northern Ireland

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the Department of Education Northern Ireland properties that are currently out of use, indicating the cost of their maintenance. [6050]

Mr. Moss: At present, there are no DENI properties currently out of use.

George Finbar Ross

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if it is the policy of Her Majesty's Government to take steps to secure co-operation from the United States Government for the extradition of George Finbar Ross to Northern Ireland. [7371]

Sir John Wheeler: The question of seeking the extradition of Mr. Ross remains under active consideration.

It is not the practice of the relevant authorities to give details of the actions being taken to secure the apprehension of wanted persons or the progress thereof: to do so could undermine the effectiveness of those actions.

International Investments Ltd. (Gibraltar)

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions have been held between Her Majesty's Government and the Government of the Republic of Ireland on International Investments Ltd. (Gibraltar), liquidation fraud. [7372]

Sir John Wheeler: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave him on 19 December, *Official Report*, column *1076*.

Badger Setts, Carnmoney Hill

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 18 December, *Official Report*, column *906*, who carried out the badger survey commissioned by the developer of a golf club at Carnmoney hill, and if he will place a copy in the Library. [8117]

Sir John Wheeler: A copy of the badger survey, completed by field workers of Queen's university, Belfast, has been placed in the Library.

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the expenditure of his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title for each year since 1990–91; and what estimate he has made for 1995–96 based on expenditure to date and existing plans. [6565]

Sir John Wheeler: Newspaper advertising expenditure by the Northern Ireland Office and its Departments and by agencies since 1990–91 is listed. An estimated outturn figure for 1995–96 is included. Information is not available by title. Expenditure by non-departmental public bodies is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

	NI departments and NI office £	*Agencies* £
1990–91	3,024,220	210,055
1991–92	4,419,230	118,781
1992–93	3,972,001	255,500
1993–94	3,181,384	215,317
1994–95	2,777,464	205,508
1995–96	3,448,157	229,202

Figures for 1990–91 and 1992–93 do not include the Department of Health and Social Services as these are not available.

Figures for 1990–91 and 1991–92 include advertising other than newspaper advertising by part of the Department of Economic Development.

Firearms

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number of legally held *(a)* shotguns; *(b)* air rifles; *(c)* automatic weapons; *(d)* semi-automatic weapons and *(e)* other weapons, breaking down the figures for each police sub-divisional region. [7395]

Sir John Wheeler: Although the information to answer the question is not readily available in the format requested, the chief constable advises that at 31 October 1995 there were 133,769 legally held firearms in Northern Ireland. Of these, there were

(a) 85,186 shotguns;

(b) 20,982 air weapons (includes air rifles);

(c) other firearms—27,601.

Separate figures for air rifles, semi-automatic or automatic firearms and sub-divisional areas can not be provided, except at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number of legally held weapons in Northern Ireland as a proportion of the resident population, or such figures as are readily available. [7394]

Sir John Wheeler: Firearms licensing is the responsibility of the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. He advises me that, at 31 October 1995, there were 133,769 firearms held on certificate under the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 1981. This equates to approximately one firearm per nine head of the population[1].

[1]Based on 1991 census statistics.

Executive Agencies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if answers sent to hon. Members in reply to parliamentary questions by the head of executive agencies in his Department are *(a)* seen, *(b)* approved and

(c) amended by him before they are sent; and if he will identify such letters to which amendments by him have been made in 1994–95. [7822]

Sir John Wheeler: As responsibility to answer parliamentary questions on operational matters has been delegated to the chief executives of executive agencies, such answers provided by chief executives are not approved or amended by Ministers before being sent to hon. Members. The questions and answers are copied to Ministers, for information, usually before the reply appears in *Hansard*.

Internet

Mr. Austin Mitchell To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what web site his Department maintains on the Internet, what information is provided there, how often it is updated, what is the address, and if he or his Department answers questions and supplies additional information through the Internet. [7573]

Sir John Wheeler: The Northern Ireland civil service maintains the Northern Ireland Government server based at Stormont. This server holds information relating to all Northern Ireland Departments and their agencies and this is being developed on an on-going basis to provide more in-depth information. The server is updated on a daily basis. The address for the server is:

http://www.nics.gov.uk

Questions are sent to the server via e-mail and are answered by e-mail. Where necessary, questions are forwarded to a specific Government Department to provide an appropriate reply.

Community Care and Income Support

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if changes to community care and income support rules will apply to those who entered residential care before April 1996. [8103]

Sir John Wheeler: Yes.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the change to community care and income support rules in respect of spouses' entitlement to half their partner's occupational pension when the partner has gone into residential care applies to Northern Ireland. [8102]

Sir John Wheeler: Yes.

Coinage

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consultations he had with *(a)* the Royal Mint and *(b)* other interested parties about the design of the new Northern Ireland 1966 £1 coin; and if he will make a statement. [7762]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: In 1993, the Royal Mint advisory committee recommended a design for the Northern Ireland £1 coin featuring the Celtic cross and a torc. I was consulted at that time about the proposed design and agreed that the design was acceptable. No other parties were involved in the decision-making process.

Young People (Religion)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of 18 to 21-year-olds in Northern Ireland are *(a)* Protestants and *(b)* Roman Catholics. [8101]

Sir John Wheeler: The 1991 census of population contains information on the breakdown of the population of Northern Ireland by religious denomination. The information in relation to the population aged 18 to 21 years is as follows:

	Percentage of 18 to 21-year-olds
Roman Catholic	42.38
Presbyterian, Church of Ireland and Methodist	39.47
Others	8.09
Answered "None" to the question on religion	3.74
Did not answer the Religion question	6.32

The "others" category contains some non-Christian religions. A detailed breakdown of the denominations in this category is provided in table 8A of the "Northern Ireland census 1991 summary report: HMSO 1992".

Greenpark Hospital Trust

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what time factor is permitted in the contract between the Greenpark Hospital trust and Mediguard for the former to delay paying the latter for the supply of contracted and other purchase services. [8224]

Sir John Wheeler: The contract conditions provide that the trust must pay such amounts as may be properly due to the contractor under the terms of the contract within 30 days of receipt of the invoice. Payment may be made in part, pending clarification of any items under dispute.

WALES

Ministerial Travel and Accommodation Costs

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the total cost for himself and other departmental Ministers for each year since 1991–92, with an estimate for the current year of *(a)* overseas travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers and their advisers, *(b)* car and chauffeuring costs of Ministers, *(c)* ministerial security costs and *(d)* domestic travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers. [6418]

Mr. Hague: The cost of the ministerial use of the official car service is as follows:

1991–92: £158,535

1992–93: £170,062

1993–94: £174,069

1994–95: £176,452

1995–96 (to end November 1995): £121,000.

Expenditure on the other items in each of the last five years is not collected in the format requested but is included in the running cost expenditure of my Department, which is published in the Welsh Office departmental report for 1995 (Cm 2815).

Departmental Running Costs

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the cost of running his departmental office, and that of his predecessor for each year since 1990–91 including the current year, broken down into *(a)* telephone bills, *(b)* total staff costs, *(c)* press and communications, *(d)* entertainment, *(e)* alcoholic drinks, *(f)* non-alcoholic drinks, *(g)* stationery, *(h)* office refurbishment and (i) other. [6417]

Mr. Hague: The available information for my Department's private office, which serves all three Welsh Office Ministers, is as follows:

Private Office costs

£000

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96 (to end-November)*
Salaries[1]	425	434	540	636	615	403
Travel and subsistence[2]	171	162	166	175	177	64
Hospitality	20	10	9	8	10	4
Stationery	n/a	20	25	29	25	13
Training	n/a	n/a	0	2	0	0
Telecommunications	70	72	74	41	41	28

Notes:
[1] Includes the cost of the Secretary of State's special adviser as well as officials. Superannuation costs are included only from 1993–94.
[2] Includes expenditure by Ministers as well as officials.
Expenditure on the other items in each of the last five years is not collected in the format requested but is included in the running cost expenditure of my Department, which is published in the Welsh Office departmental report for 1995 (Cm 2815).

Severe Head Injuries

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects the chairmen and chief executives working party to meet to discuss the Welsh Affairs Committee report on severe head injuries. [6679]

Mr. Richards: The chairmen and chief executives working party has established a steering group, whose core membership details are being finalised. The steering group's first meeting to discuss the report will be in early January 1996.

Slow Learners

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what amount of moneys he has released for the next financial year for the purposes of assisting slow learners in *(a)* the primary sector and *(b)* the secondary sector; and if he will make a statement. [6725]

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend announced his provisional local government revenue proposals for 1996–97 in the House on 28 November. It is for individual local authorities to determine how the resources that are made available are allocated between services, including education, in the light of their statutory responsibilities and their perception of local needs and priorities.

Electronic Mail

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for the introduction of electronic mail for the issuing of press releases and for communication between his departmental offices in Cardiff and London and the Library. [7581]

Mr. Hague: At present, there is no electronic mail facility for the distribution of press notices. However, as electronic mail is developed internally, the opportunity may be taken to extend it to the House of Commons Library. There is a limited electronic mail link between some departmental offices in Cardiff and London.

School Milk

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what considerations underlay the decision to reduce subsidies for school milk; and if he will list *(a)* the gross estimated savings to the Government in Wales on account of this change and *(b)* the net savings after deducting the EU contribution towards the cost of the scheme. [7407]

Mr. Hague: The Government are withdrawing support from 1996–97 for the discretionary elements of the EC school milk subsidy scheme. The elements affected are milk for school catering and for secondary school children. Estimates suggest that only around 20 per cent. of the total number of children of all ages currently benefit from the scheme. In the light of this it is doubtful whether either element has had any significant effect on the encouragement of milk consumption, which is the objective of the EU scheme.

Savings will amount to approximately £6 million per annum in European funding, which will represent a net saving to the Exchequer of about £4 million per annum for the UK. Separate figures are not available for Wales.

Internet

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what web site his Department maintains on the Internet; what information is provided there; how often it is updated; what is the address; and if he or his Department answers questions and supplies additional information through the Internet. [7578]

Mr. Hague: The Welsh Office is currently piloting a world wide web site on the Internet. The pilot project is being led by the Welsh Office industry and training department and it currently offers information covering regional selective assistance, people and prosperity—an agenda for action in Wales, and assisted areas in Wales. This information was first made available in November 1995 and will be updated regularly in 1996.

The Department does not presently answer questions or supply additional information through the Internet. Part of the remit of the pilot project is to examine the methodology for doing so to help inform the development of policy and on the use of the Internet.

The Welsh Office server can be found at Internet address:

HTTP://www.welsh-ofce.gov.uk.

Teaching Hospitals (Overheads)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with GP fundholders and hospitals in south Wales concerning the appropriate level of remuneration required to cover additional teaching overheads by *(a)* the University hospital of Wales and *(b)* other hospitals in which there is teaching activity for the medical schools; and if he will make a statement. [7584]

Mr. Hague: The report of the advisory group on the service increment for teaching, SIFT, which funds the costs to the NHS of supporting the teaching of medical undergraduates, was circulated for comment to chief executives of NHS trusts and family health service authorities in Wales in June 1995. Following acceptance of the report's recommendations for the future of SIFT, guidance was issued in December to assist NHS trusts who support undergraduate medical teaching in identifying the costs of doing so, over and above the costs of patient care.

Archive Services

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the estimated capital and revenue costs for each of the new unitary authorities of providing archive services in 1996–97. [6603]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This is a matter for individual unitary authorities.

Roads

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to introduce *(a)* porous surfaces, *(b)* variable message signs and *(c)* chevron markings on carriageways. [7618]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Porous surfaces, variable message signs and chevron markings are already in use on the trunk road and motorway network. Further applications will be provided where they can be justified.

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the National Rivers Authority Wales region and Dwr Cymru Welsh Water in relation to reassessment of the water quality standard intended for the lake impounded under the Cardiff bay barrage scheme. [7969]

Mr. Hague: None. Provisions for relevant water quality standards are contained in the Cardiff Bay Barrage Act 1993.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation concerning reductions in the proposed capital schemes to be completed under the Cardiff bay barrage outfall accommodation works; [7967]

(2) what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation concerning funding for capital works to meet the water quality standards set out in the Cardiff Bay Barrage Act 1993 and its side agreements; and if he will make a statement; [7970]

(3) what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation concerning the change in the maximum number of sewage spills in a typical year into the Rivers Taff and Ely and the area of the impounded lake behind the Cardiff bay barrage and its implications for water quality and water sports; and if he will make a statement. [7968]

Mr. Hague: None. These are operational matters for the corporation.

Housing

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* local authority and *(b)* housing association houses there are in Wales. [7813]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on local authority and housing association dwelling stock numbers in Wales has been published in table 1.3 of Welsh housing statistics No. 15 1995, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of jobs created by the building of a typical local authority house for rent. [7815]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to allow local authorities to build more low-cost homes for rent. [7814]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 18 December.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many mobile telephones have been supplied to his Department in each of the last eight years; and in each of those years how many different suppliers were involved. [8040]

Mr. Hague: Figures are available only for the last five years:

1990–91: 27
1991–92: 28
1992–93: 40
1993–94: 140
1994–95: 148.

All purchases are subject to competition and at least three different companies are invited to tender.

Cervical Cancer Screening

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library a copy of the report of the expert advisory group on cervical cancer screening services in Wales. [7964]

Mr. Hague: Copies of the expert advisory group's report have been placed in the Library of the House.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Upper Waiting Hall Exhibition

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to Crime Concern and the Prudential youth action group initiative to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall. [8094]

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 11 March to Friday 15 March 1996.

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to London health to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall. [8157]

Mr. Martin: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 22 January to Friday 26 January 1996.

State Opening (Photographer)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby of 13 December, *Official Report*, column *659*, what factors led to the decision that one photographer only should be allowed to be present in the Gallery. [7756]

Mr. Michael J. Martin: The fact that only one application to take photographs for official purposes was received.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 9 January. [6753]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 9 January. [6755]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Royal Household

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Prime Minister how much has been saved in efficiency gains in respect of the grant in aid budget to the royal household since 1991. [7051]

The Prime Minister: Grant in aid for the royal household from 1991–92 to 1994–95 has decreased by 14.2 per cent. In cash terms. Details are set out in the royal household's annual report for the year to 31 March 1995, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Monetary Union

Mr. Shore: To ask the Prime Minister further to his oral statement of Monday 18 December, on the Madrid European Council, when and by what means article 3 of the protocol on the convergence criteria referred to in article 109(J) of the treaty on European Union was deleted or amended. [7620]

The Prime Minister: Article 3 of the protocol on the convergence criteria has been neither deleted nor amended. It will be for the Council, meeting as Heads of State or Government in early 1998, to decide pursuant to the provisions of the treaty which member states fulfil the necessary conditions to move to stage 3 of economic and monetary union. It is not possible to say now precisely how the exchange rate criterion will be interpreted, given the changes in the way the exchange rate mechanism has operated since the treaty was agreed.

Protocol No. 11, annexed to the EC treaty, means that the United Kingdom shall not be obliged or committed to move to the third stage of economic union without a separate decision to do so by the Government and Parliament. We will agree to take part in a single currency only if it is in our national interest to do so, given the circumstances at the time.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral statement of 18 December, *Official Report*, column 1219–35, concerning his intention to initiate a study into the proposals for monetary union within the European Union, by whom the study will be conducted; what the terms of reference of the inquiry will be; if written or oral evidence can be submitted to it; if it will operate in public at any time; and when he expects it to report. [7669]

The Prime Minister: The Madrid European Council requested that the Ecofin Council, together with, in their respective fields of competence, the Commission and the European Monetary Institute, should study the range of issues raised by the fact that some countries might not initially participate in the Euro area. In particular, the study should cover those issues related to monetary

stability. The Council noted that the future relationships would have to be defined prior to the move to stage 3 and requested that the Ecofin Council should report on these issues as soon as possible.

The United Kingdom's participation in this study in no way prejudges the United Kingdom's decision whether to notify our intention to move to stage 3 of EMU in accordance with the provisions of protocol 11 annexed to the EC treaty.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister which countries declared their intention to participate in monetary union at the Madrid summit. [7555]

The Prime Minister: All EU member states except for the United Kingdom and Denmark are committed to participation in the third stage of economic and monetary union in accordance with the EC treaty.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister what system of redistribution and on what scale was proposed at the Madrid summit to compensate *(a)* nations and *(b)* regions damaged by monetary union; and if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom role in respect of such compensatory measures. [7707]

The Prime Minister: No system of redistribution was proposed at the European Council at Madrid.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list those countries which he assessed would be able to meet the Maastricht convergence conditions by January 1998 on current trends projected. [7709]

The Prime Minister: The question of which countries fulfil the necessary conditions for adoption of the single currency will be decided by the Council of Ministers, meeting in the form of Heads of State or Government. The latest Commission forecasts, released on 22 November 1995, provided information on the projected status of each member state in 1997. The forecast are available in the House of Commons Library.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Prime Minister how many mobile telephones have been supplied to Departments for which he is immediately responsible in each of the last eight years; and in each of those years how many different suppliers were involved. [8026]

The Prime Minister: For these purposes, my office is part of the Cabinet Office (Office of Public Service). I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service.

The Euro (Information)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister what plans Her Majesty's Government have to provide financial support from public funds to groups and organisations to circulate information on the Euro. [7763]

The Prime Minister: The Community budget provides for the Commission to spend 50 mecu in the 1996 calender year promoting specific policies, such as citizen first and the single currency, with a view to preparing the intergovernmental conference. Member states voted to strike this expenditure out of the Community budget but it was reinstated by the European Parliament. The Community budget for 1997 has not yet been agreed. Like other member states, the United Kingdom contributes to the EC budget as a whole rather than to the costs of individual spending programmes.

The Government have no plans for direct Government expenditure on circulating information on the Euro in the United Kingdom. Protocol No. 11, annexed to the EC treaty, means that the United Kingdom shall not be obliged or committed to move to the third stage of economic union without a separate decision to do so by the Government and Parliament. We will agree to take part in a single currency only if it is in our national interest to do so, given the circumstances at the time.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to restrict the circulation by the EC of information on the Euro in the United Kingdom. [7764]

The Prime Minister: It is not yet clear what kind of information the Commission plans to circulate.

Protocol No. 11, annexed to the EC treaty, means that the United Kingdom shall not be obliged or committed to move to the third stage of economic union without a separate decision to do so by the Government and Parliament. We will agree to take part in a single currency only if it is in our national interest to do so, given the circumstances at the time.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister how much is to be spent by the European Commission in the next two financial years promoting the Euro; how much of that will be spent in the United Kingdom; and what the British contribution will be to the total expenditure. [7710]

The Prime Minister: The Community budget provides for the Commission to spend 50 mecu in the 1996 calendar year promoting specific policies, such as citizen first and the single currency, with a view to preparing the intergovernmental conference. Member states voted to strike this expenditure out of the Community budget but it was reinstated by the European Parliament. The Community budget for 1997 has not yet been agreed. Like other member states, the United Kingdom contributes to the EC budget as a whole rather than to the costs of individual spending programmes.

The Government have no plans for direct Government expenditure on circulating information on the Euro in the United Kingdom. Protocol No. 11, annexed to the EC treaty, means that the United Kingdom shall not be obliged or committed to move to the third stage of economic union without a separate decision to do so by the Government and Parliament. We will agree to take part in a single currency only if it is in our national interest to do so, given the circumstances at the time.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government in respect of access to United Kingdom *(a)* media and *(b)* educational institutions for those promoting the Euro as part of the Commission's publicity campaign. [7727]

The Prime Minister: It is not yet clear what kind of information the Commission plans to circulate.

Protocol No. 11, annexed to the EC treaty, means that the United Kingdom shall not be obliged or committed to move to the third stage of economic union without a

separate decision to do so by the Government and Parliament. We will agree to take part in a single currency only if it is in our national interest to do so, given the circumstances at the time.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister if United Kingdom citizens will be allowed to hold Euro accounts in the United Kingdom if Britain does not join monetary union. [7711]

The Prime Minister: United Kingdom citizens are currently able to hold bank accounts denominated in foreign currencies in the United Kingdom. The Government see no reason why that should change in any way if the United Kingdom does not participate in the third stage of economic and monetary union.

Under protocol No. 11 of the EC treaty, the United Kingdom shall not be obliged or committed to move to the third stage economic and monetary union without a separate decision to do so by the Government and Parliament. We will agree to take part in a single currency only if that is in our national interest to do so, given the circumstances of the time.

Nuclear Materials (Exports)

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 11 December, *Official Report*, column *473*, if he will list all countries to which nuclear materials, equipment or technology have been exported, under the exception clause of the nuclear suppliers group guidelines, in the last five years. [8283]

The Prime Minister: There have been no exports from the United Kingdom of nuclear materials or technology under the exception to the policy, agreed in April 1992.

Princess of Wales

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister on whose initiative the meeting on 20 December with Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales was arranged. [8330]

The Prime Minister: I have meetings with the Princess of Wales at times arranged between us.

Civil Servants

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the exchanges he has authorised between members of Her Majesty's Opposition and senior civil servants since 1 January. [8233]

The Prime Minister: As I made clear in my answer to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) on 30 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *835*, I will be content to authorise confidential exchanges between senior civil servants and Opposition spokesmen from January 1996. As yet, I have not been approached by the leader of the Opposition to authorise such exchanges.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Prime Minister if he will ask the Scott inquiry to investigate the letter written by the right hon. Member for South Thanet (Mr. Aitken) to Astra Ltd. on 8 March 1985. [7410]

The Prime Minister: It is for Sir Richard Scott to decide for himself what to investigate within his terms of reference.

Fouad Makhzoumi

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Prime Minister if he will ban future contact by his Department with Fouad Makhzoumi of FMS in relation to defence sales to Lebanon. [7411]

The Prime Minister: There are no plans to ban contact between officials from any Government Department and Mr. Fouad Makhzoumi.

Exchange Rate Mechanism

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will make a statement on the prospect for an exchange rate mechanism for those EEC members who do not join the single currency; [7552]

(2) what restraints were proposed by the advocates of monetary union at the Madrid summit on the freedom of action of those countries which do not join it. [7653]

The Prime Minister: The European Council agreed at Madrid that the Ecofin Council, together with, in their respective fields of competence, the Commission and the European Monetary Institute, will study the range of issues raised by the fact that some countries might not initially participate in the Euro area. In particular, the study should cover those issues related to monetary stability.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister to what extent progress to monetary union requires Britain to rejoin the ERM *(a)* as a condition for fulfilling the preliminary stages of EMU before giving notice to join or otherwise and *(b)* as a condition of staying out; and if he will make a statement. [7712]

The Prime Minister: Protocol No. 11, annexed to the EC treaty, means that the United Kingdom shall not be obliged or committed to move to the third stage of economic union without a separate decision to do so by the Government and Parliament.

It will be for the Council, meeting as Heads of State or Government in 1998, to decide pursuant to the provisions of the EC treaty which member states fulfil the necessary conditions for the adoption of the single currency. It is not possible to say now precisely how the exchange rate criterion will be interpreted, given the changes in the way the ERM has operated since the treaty was agreed.

The Madrid European Council requested that the Ecofin Council, together with, in their respective fields of competence, the Commission and the European Monetary Institute, will study the range of issues raised by the fact that some countries might not initially participate in the Euro area. In particular, the study should cover those issues related to monetary stability.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Executive Agencies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if answers sent to hon. Members in reply to parliamentary questions by the head of executive agencies in his Department are *(a)* seen, *(b)* approved and *(c)* amended by him before they are sent; and if he will identify such letters to which amendments by him have been made in 1994–95. [7823]

Mr. Willetts: Parliamentary questions are passed to the head of an executive agency for reply when the matter is one delegated to him or her under the agency framework document. The relevant Minister may see a copy of the reply before it is sent, but would not normally intervene in operational matters.

Ascertaining whether any letters since 1994–95 have been amended could be done only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Running Costs

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what is the estimate of the cost of running his departmental office, and that of his predecessor, for each year since 1990–91 including an estimate for the current year, broken down into *(a)* telephone bills, *(b)* total staff costs, *(c)* press and communications, *(d)* entertainment, *(e)* alcoholic drinks, *(f)* non-alcoholic drinks, *(g)* stationery, *(h)* office refurbishment and *(i)* other. [6397]

The Deputy Prime Minister: Estimated costs for this financial year, July 1995 to March 1996 are given.

(a) Costs are not identified separately for the office.

(b) £320,000.

(c) Costs are not identified separately for the office.

(d) For working lunches and dinners, £6,200.

(e) Nil.

(f) £150.

(g) £6,500.

(h) I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave on 30 October, *Official Report*, column 6.

£60,000 (incudes cost of car and travel).

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list all qualitative and quantitative research projects and surveys carried out for his Department and those parts of the Government for which he is responsible into aspects of public attitudes and opinions *(a)* in general and *(b)* in relation to specific policy proposals in each of the past three years to December 1995, indicating for each project or survey (i) the date on which the research was commissioned, (ii) the amount which his Department spent, (iii) who carried out the research, (iv) the number of people surveyed or taking part, (v) the location and time scale and (vi) which individuals and organisations have been given access to the findings. [5971]

Mr. Willetts: The information is as follows:

	Date research commissioned	*Amount department spent £ (excluding VAT)*	*Who carried out the research*	*Number of people surveyed*	*Location and timescale*	*Who has access to findings*
Citizen's Charter Customer Survey	March 1993	75,000	ICM Research	3,097	GB 27 March-10 April 1993	Published August 1993
Complaints Task Force	May 1994	69,400	MORI	1,731	GB June-November 1994	Published June 1995
Charter Mark Nomination Scheme	March 1995	7,800	MORI	1,967	UK pre research: March 1995 post research: June 1995	Not published
Report Back Research	September 1995	8,775	NOP	264 (pre-stage) 531 (post stage)	Birmingham and Bristol pre research: September 1995 post research October 1995	Not published
Simplifying system for business start up	August 1995	137,907 including VAT	KMPG Management Consultants	60 small businesses and business intermediaries	parts of England and Wales August-September-October 1995	None so far—study not yet complete

Fox Hunting

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to ban fox hunting and shooting of wild birds in the *(a)* Crewe survey, *(b)* South survey, *(c)* Needlewood estate, *(d)* Lancashire survey and *(e)* Yorkshire survey. [7042]

Mr. Freeman: I have no plans to ban fox hunting or the shooting of wild birds which are not a protected species on the Duchy estates mentioned.

Set-aside Land

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the amount of EU subsidy received by the Duchy from the set-aside scheme and common agricultural policy programmes in the last year for which figures are available. [7043]

Mr. Freeman: The Duchy has received no EU subsidy from the set-aside scheme and CAP programmes.

Efficiency Gains

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what efficiency gains have been achieved in the running of the Duchy over the past three years. [7047]

Mr. Freeman: Over the last three and a half years, from the period ending 29 September 1992 to 31 March 1995, the total costs on the Duchy of Lancaster's estates and investments account have fallen in real terms by 7 per cent., and the number of employees has been reduced from 50 to 47.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many mobile telephones have been supplied to his Department in each of the last eight years; and in each of those years how many different suppliers were involved. [8027]

Mr. Willetts: This information is not held centrally and is available only at disproportionate cost.

Photocopiers

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 6 December, *Official Report*, column *256*, what is the estimated cost of settling the outstanding leases on the 13 photocopiers replaced by the Cabinet Office and its agencies and HMSO and the Central Office of Information; and what is *(a)* the length of contract for each of the new photocopiers acquired by his Department, *(b)* the minimum contractual cost of using these machines in each year and *(c)* the maximum amount by which the maintenance and or servicing cost can rise during the whole course of the contracts. [7982]

Mr. Willetts: There were no settlement costs in respect of leases for the 25 photocopiers replaced by the Cabinet Office and its agencies—11 machines— and HMSO and the Central Office of Information—14 machines. Eighteen of the machines are leased on three-year contracts, three are on four-year contracts and four are on five-year contracts. The minimum contractual cost of leasing these machines is £56,189 per annum. The maximum amount by which the maintenance and/or servicing costs can rise during the course of contract is limited to the rate of inflation as measured by the retail price index.

Open Government Code

Dr. Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much public advertising has been undertaken to publicise the open government code; and at what cost. [6674]

Mr. Willetts: The code of practice on access to Government information came into force on 4 April 1994. In 1994–95, 52,000 copies of the Office of Public Service leaflet explaining the operation of the code and over 5,000 copies of the code of practice itself were distributed to organisations such as citizens advice bureaux and libraries, at a total cost including printing and distribution of £19,048.

In 1995–96, this leaflet has been redesigned, and is being made widely available. A display poster, advertising the code, has also been prepared. To date, some 70,000 standard English language leaflets, 2,500 posters and 4,500 leaflets in formats for the visually impaired have been produced and distributed to public outlets as above. A further 30,000 standard English language leaflets, about 5,000 in formats for the visually impaired and about 30,000 in ethnic minority languages, are currently being produced, and will be distributed in January 1996. The total cost in 1995–96, including production and distribution, is expected to be around £80,000.

The code has also been publicised in the citizens charter "Report Back" newsletter, which was distributed by direct mailing in major cities in September and October 1995. The full code and the revised leaflet have also been made available on the Internet. These methods of advertising have involved no separate additional cost.

Individual Departments have issued press releases and made explanatory material tailored to their own circumstances available on request as follows:

Department	*Leaflets issued*	*Expenditure*
Department for Education and Employment	195,000	[1]£22,981
Department of Environment	not known	*£170
Foreign and Commonwealth Office including Overseas Development Administration	not known	£1,970
Department of Health	*30,000	[2]£3,135
Home Office	5,000	£1,350
Lord Chancellor's Department	not known	*£1,000
Northern Ireland Office	[3]4,500	£2,945
Scottish Office	not known	*£100
Department of Social Security	[4]315,000	£13,324
Department of Trade and Industry	[5]2,000	[6]£1,602
Department of Transport	not known	£1,338
Welsh Office	8,500	£2,881
Non-ministerial departments and agencies		
Charity Commissioners	[7]157,000	£14,981
Customs and Excise	12,000	£1,486
Data Protection Registrar	not known	£2,100
Office of Fair Trading	not known	[8]£6,836
Inland Revenue	[9]not known	£6,073
OFSTED	not known	*£200
OFWAT	not known	*£100

Entries marked with an asterisk are approximate figures.

[1] Includes £2,849 for Employment Service and £581 for Department for Education. Also includes £19,551 for 75,000 Health and Safety Executive leaflets.

[2] Includes £500 for Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys.

[3] These were inserts to the OPS leaflet and were aimed at the public. Some of the money spent by NIO was also used on internal publicity for the Code of Practice.

[4] Includes braille, audio cassette and Welsh language versions. Distributed to local offices and Citizens' Advice Bureaux.

[5] Figure for 1995 only.

[6] Includes £970.65 in 1994, £352 in 1995 updating 1994 leaflet, and £380 on a series of Internet pages.

[7] Includes 5,000 Open Government leaflets in 1994 and 152,000 combined Open Government/general information leaflets in 1995.

[8] Cost of producing a Citizen's Charter booklet including information on the Open Government Code of Practice.

[9] Available at every Tax Office.

Internet

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what web site his Department maintains on the Internet; what information is provided there; how often it is updated; what is the address; and if he or his

Department answers questions and supplies additional information through the Internet. [7580]

Mr. Willetts: CCTA, the Government centre for information systems, maintains the CCTA Government information service on the world wide web at www.open.gov.uk. This provides search and retrieval facilities with links to information from 140 public sector organisations, some of which use the CCTA server, others of which have their own. The individual organisations are responsible for updating their information.

The Cabinet Office has a number of home pages:

Cabinet Office: www.open.gov.uk/co/cohome.htm

CCTA: www.open.gov.uk/ccta/cctahome.htm

Citizen's Charter Unit: www.open.gov.uk/charter/ccuhome.htm

Machinery of Government and Standards Group: www.open.gov.uk/m-of-g/mghome.htm

The available information includes an outline of Cabinet Office activities; publications, services and events from CCTA, along with on-line public discussions via the collaborative open groups; the full text of all the citizens charters, along with the recent winners; and the text of the open government "*Code of Practice on Access to Information*". This includes an e-mail reply facility for further information and advice on the open government initiative. Information on the Government information service on the world wide web is updated several times a day.

Cabinet Office agencies—the Civil Service College, the Central Office of Information and HMSO—also have web sites.

The Cabinet Office answers questions and supplies additional information through the Internet at both ministerial and official levels. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and I can be contacted by e-mail at the following addresses:

rfreeman.mp.cdl@ccta.gov.uk

dwilletts@ccta.gov.uk

Ministerial Travel and Accommodation Costs

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what is his estimate of the total cost for himself and other departmental Ministers for each year since 1991–92, including an estimate for the current year of *(a)* overseas travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers and their advisers, *(b)* car and chauffeuring costs of Ministers, *(c)* ministerial security costs and *(d)* domestic travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers. [6398]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am replying in respect of my own post, which came into being in July 1995. The Chancellor of the Duchy will be answering separately on behalf of OPS Ministers. Estimated costs for myself for the current financial year—July 1995–March 1996—are as follows:

(a) Nil

(b) £30,000 (excluding VAT). For additional information, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 19 July, *Official Report*, column *1272*).

(c) Nil

(d) Domestic travel—£2,600

Accommodation—nil.

Government Bills and Papers

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make it his policy to ensure that Government Bills and papers published by HMSO are available in HMSO bookshops outside London on the same date as they are on sale in the capital. [7433]

Mr. Willetts: Significant Command Papers are made available simultaneously in HMSO's regional bookshops whenever production timetables and security considerations allow; arrangements are also made for local availability when titles are likely to have particular relevance in any specific area. The timetables for Bill production usually preclude release outside London on the day of publication but, during recent months, HMSO has transmitted the text of selected Government Bills for local printing and same-day publication in Edinburgh. The results of this initiative are being evaluated.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Departmental Staff (Members' Letters)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many officials he employed *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time in his Department in each of the last three years to answer letters sent to him from hon. Members; and what was the estimated overall cost of replying to them in each of the last three years. [5609]

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* This Department currently employs seven full-time staff to manage over 10,000 cases of Ministers' correspondence annually. However, it is impossible to estimate the precise cost of dealing with these, because no record is kept of the contribution made by other officials. The Department ensures that such correspondence is dealt with as cost effectively as possible.

EC Export Subsidies

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the accounting and audit procedures in respect of payments of EC export subsidies to producers of composite food products outside annex II of the general agreement on tariffs and trade treaty, where it is deemed inappropriate and bureaucratic to quantify the basic commodities involved. [5899]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have asked the chief executive of the Intervention Board to reply to the hon. Member direct.

Letter from George Trevelyan to Mr. Austin Mitchell, dated 9 January 1996:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question about EC export subsidies to producers of composite food products as the matter is within the operational responsibility of this Executive Agency. [5899]

I am sending a copy of this letter to the House of Commons Library and the Public Information Office.

I believe that the question relates to food products outside Annex II of the Treaty of Rome, which are commonly known as processed goods.

Export refunds are paid upon the basic agricultural products (for example, cereals, sugar, and milk) when they are used in the manufacture of processed goods (such as biscuits and cakes) which are themselves exported. As you indicated in your question, the Community has taken the view that for claimants to establish for each export the quantities of basic products contained would be inappropriate and bureaucratic. It would also be very costly if laboratory analysis was required for each consignment. A system was therefore designed, and its use authorised by Community regulations, in which the manufacturer lodges with the Agency a "recipe" for the processed good in question, and this is given a code number. Thereafter, exporters declare only the weight of the processed good exported and the "recipe" number. The recipe differs from that word in common parlance and consists only of the percentages of basic agricultural products contained in unit weight of the processed good. The export refund payment is then calculated by reference to the content identified by the recipe number.

By a system which combines regulatory requirements and risk analysis techniques, public funds are safeguarded from false recipe declarations either by pre-production verification of the recipe proportions or by laboratory analysis of samples taken from export consignments, or both. In the event that the export declaration proves false the payment of export refund is reassessed.

With the exception of the recipe system the accounting and audit procedures, including those of NAO, Commission auditors and the European Court of Auditors are the same for processed goods as for Annex II basic agricultural products.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assurances he has received that cattle in other countries are free of BSE. [6210]

Mrs. Browning: BSE is a notifiable disease under the rules of the Office of International Epizootics. This places an obligation on all of that organisation's member countries to report all cases of BSE. We have been notified, up to 18 December, of BSE cases in 10 countries, than the United as Kingdom, as follows:

Country	*Number of BSE cases*
Canada	[1]1
Denmark	[1]1
Falklands Islands	[1]1
France	12
Germany	[1]4
Republic of Ireland	112
Italy	[1]2
Oman	[1]2
Portugal	28
Switzerland	183

[1]These countries have only had cases in cattle imported from the UK.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps are being taken to isolate bovine spongiform encephalopathy symptomatic cattle at markets and abattoirs; and if he will make a statement. [6954]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* All cattle are subject to an ante mortem inspection prior to slaughter at abattoirs, all adult cattle and any showing unusual symptoms are examined by a veterinary surgeon. Any displaying symptoms of BSE are killed and incinerated. Market inspectors will also report any cattle showing potential symptoms of BSE to the Ministry for subsequent veterinary examination and diagnosis: those considered to be actual BSE suspects are killed and incinerated. However inspectors do not examine all cattle at markets, nor are all cattle going to slaughter sold through markets.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into rapid research methods of diagnosis of spongiform encephalopathies. [6971]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* The Ministry has a wide programme of research to study the nature of the BSE agent and to develop diagnostic tests for it. This work is costing around £1.4 million in the current financial year and is being carried out in six different research laboratories.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated in respect of (i) experiments involving the inoculation of mice into a level of BSE toxicity in various bovine tissues and (ii) how much BSE infectivity is required to produce positive results in experimental mice. [7142]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 20 December 1995]:* The murine assay for the presence of BSE infectivity does not determine the level of infectivity present in tissues, other than to show that sufficient infectivity is present to produce disease in mice using a protocol designed to maximise the sensitivity of the assay. Using this assay BSE infectivity has been shown to be present in the brain, spinal cord and retina of clinically affected cattle and in the distal ileum of experimentally infected calves. Infectivity estimates depend on the number of mice killed and the dilution of source material to which they become affected, but any estimate will be specific to that particular mouse model and the route of challenge.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated in respect of the amount of infectivity (i) that has been found by experimentation in various species to be capable of a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy by injection into a vein and (ii) found in animal experiments to be present in the blood of various species with transmissible spongiform encephalopathy. [7142]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 20 December 1995]:* No infectivity has been found in blood or associated blood fractions from cattle infected with BSE.

Southall Horse Market

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when his inspectors last visited the Southall horse market; what activities they undertook there; and if he will make a statement. [4474]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* Horse sales are held at the market weekly, with the numbers of horses, ponies and donkeys presented varying from sale to sale—between 30 and 100 depending on the time of year. Veterinary inspections, organised by the State Veterinary Service, are carried out on a regular basis

to monitor welfare standards, compliance with legislative requirements and to look for evidence of animal disease. Lay inspectors of the SVS and the local authority also make frequent inspection visits for similar purposes and the police and representatives of the RSPCA and horse welfare organisations regularly attend on market days. The market was last inspected—by a veterinary inspector and a lay inspector—on 6 December. They report that the police and RSPCA were also in attendance. Thirty-five horses and ponies were inspected and no problems were recorded.

Foot and Mouth Disease

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many ex gratia payments have been made by his Ministry to farmers for cattle vaccinated against foot and mouth disease in 1995; and if he will make a statement. [7213]

Mrs. Browning: Thirteen farmers have submitted claims for ex gratia payments in respect of cattle which tested seropositive for foot and mouth disease antibodies and subsequently slaughtered in 1993. So far 10 farmers have submitted satisfactory evidence to support their claims which have been approved for payment in 1995.

Arable Area Payments

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much money was spent in each region of England in *(a)* set-aside payments under the arable area scheme and *(b)* total arable area payments, in 1994–95. [7196]

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 20 December 1995]:* Information relating to the amounts paid in each region of England in 1994–95 for set-aside and for total arable area payments, including set-aside, is not available. The table gives the payments claimed in each region. The total amounts paid will have been slightly lower following any necessary reductions.

	Set -aside payments £	*Total arable area payments (including set-aside)* £
Anglia	49,732,127	290,606,407
East Midlands	34,980,304	213,995,714
North-East	27,982,674	167,431,900
Northern	6,364,488	40,204,615
North Mercia	8,453,480	51,494,192
South Mercia	13,807,395	83,004,365
South-East	30,151,108	170,825,110
South-West	4,387,668	29,640,602
Wessex	12,745,000	72,235,608

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much money is forecast to be spent in each region of England in *(a)* set-aside payments under the arable area scheme and *(b)* total arable area payments, in 1995–96. [7197]

Mr. Hogg *[holding answer 20 December 1995]:* The table gives the latest forecasts of the value of claims in 1995–96 for set-aside and for total arable area payments, including set-aside, for land situated in each region of England.

£ thousand

	(a) Set-aside payments	*(b) total arable area payments (including set-aside)*
Anglia	46,007	288,118
East Midlands	33,191	216,825
North-east	25,255	165,292
Northern	8,612	42,922
North Mercia	7,511	50,814
South Mercia	12,855	82,300
South-east	29,608	173,350
South-west	4,175	30,618
Wessex	11,585	72,361

Internet

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what web site his Department maintains on the Internet; what information is provided there; how often it is updated; what is the address; and if he or his Department answer questions and supply additional information through the Internet. [7563]

Mr. Boswell: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has no dedicated web site maintained on the Internet but currently uses the CCTA Government information service to publish information. MAFF has published the following documents through this service:

Ministry aims and objectives

Background to the Ministry

UK Food and Farming in figures

Getting further information from the Ministry

Schools Science Competition.

The Internet web address of these pages is:

http://www.open.gov.uk/maff/pages/maffhome.htm

Updating is carried out when the statistics published as part of "UK Food and Farming" in figures change: the opportunity is then taken to update the other pages. Updates in 1995 were done in March, August, October and November.

Electronic mail access between Ministry staff and the Internet community, via MAFF's office system, Maiden, has been in place for over 12 months and is used to answer questions and provide information through the Internet. The gateway for public inquiries using e-mail is through the MAFF helpline service on:

helpline@inf.maff.gov.uk

Hormone Residues

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many laboratories his Ministry has for the monitoring of hormone residues in *(a)* beef, *(b)* sheepmeat and *(c)* other livestock production; and if he will make a statement. [8045]

Mrs. Browning: The analysis of samples for the purposes of monitoring hormone residues in *(a)* beef, *(b)* sheepmeat and *(c)* other livestock production is carried out by the Veterinary Laboratories Agency at Weybridge under the national surveillance scheme for residues in meat.

Fisheries Council

Mr Fabricant: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Fisheries Council held in Brussels on 21 and 22 December; and if he will make a statement. [8132]

Mr. Baldry: I represented the United Kingdom at the meeting of the Fisheries Council in Brussels on 21–22 December, together with my hon. Friends the Under-Secretaries of State at the Scottish Office and at the Northern Ireland Office.

The Council agreed by qualified majority, with Sweden voting against, the total allowable catches and quotas to apply in 1996. The agreement fulfilled the Government's objective of securing the best possible deal for British fishermen consistent with the scientific advice and the conservation of stocks for the future. In the final package, the total UK quotas agreed for the stocks of most importance to our fishermen were over 50,000 tonnes higher in cod equivalent terms than the quotas being discussed at the start of negotiations. This increase is worth over £30 million to the industry at 1995 prices. I invoked Hague preference on all the stocks where it was necessary to do so.

The Council unanimously agreed access and quota arrangements for 1996 with neighbouring non-member states. The United Kingdom has large quotas at north Norway and we secured them at the same level as for 1995. Similarly, we have retained our quotas in Faroese, Greenland and Icelandic waters at the same level as in 1995. There was unanimous agreement to a negotiating mandate for the Commission to consolidate and update the Community's fisheries agreements with non-member states in the Baltic sea.

The Council agreed by qualified majority, with Portugal voting against, to the allocation of the Community's 1996 quotas in the waters covered by the North West Atlantic Fisheries Organisation. The United Kingdom's quota remains the same as in 1995. There was also unanimous agreement to a package of control measures to be applied in NAFO waters, implementing the agreement reached between the Community and Canada last April.

The Commission presented a report on the implementation of technical conservation measures under the common fisheries policy. I led the way in pressing the case for improvements to be made to help conserve stocks and it was agreed that the Commission should present new proposals including measures to increase the effectiveness of the plaice box and to improve the selectivity of towed fishing gears. The Council undertook to reach a decision on these proposals before the end of 1996.

The Commission reported on the enforcement of Community rules on drift nets in 1995. The Council noted the success of the enforcement arrangements and the very high level of compliance with the rules in the tuna fishery in the north east Atlantic.

The Council agreed by qualified majority, with the Netherlands voting against, to adjustments in the rules governing the funding of schemes to reduce the size of fishing fleets. A ceiling on the funds that may be devoted to encouraging temporary cessation of fishing activity was agreed and the level of Community funding for decommissioning vessels more than 30 years old was increased.

Agriculture Council

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Agriculture Council held in Brussels on 18 and 19 December; and if he will make a statement. [8133]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I represented the United Kingdom at this meeting of the Council together with my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State at the Scottish Office.

The Council unanimously agreed a reformed EC rice regime broadly modelled on the cereals regime following the reform of 1992. The reformed rice regime includes a significant reduction in intervention prices, accompanied by compensation payments limited to national base areas with stiff penalties if these areas are exceeded. The agreement also provides for phased improvements in quality standards to ensure EC rice production is more competitive in the face of the more open trading conditions flowing from the GATT agreement.

The Commissioner introduced a communication on the welfare of calves including in particular their rearing systems. I urged that he should bring forward without delay specific proposals for the improvement of EC rules in this area.

The Council seemed sympathetic to a demand from the Irish Minister that Irish sheepmeat producers should receive some special aid reflecting the adverse trading conditions they experienced in the middle of 1995. I expressed doubts about the justification for any such proposal but insisted that if one were produced northern Irish producers, whose situation was very similar to those in the south, should also benefit.

SCOTLAND

Hospital Services (Stonehaven)

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many letters, petitions and postcards he or his Department or Grampian health board have received relating to the proposal to put out to tender the provision of hospital services at Stonehaven; and how many of these were *(a)* in favour and *(b)* opposed to the proposal. [7758]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend and I have received 29 letters about the proposals. No petitions have been received. A total of 575 pre-printed postcards have been sent by individuals to my right hon. Friend or his predecessor. The letters reflect a range of views with most accepting that a new hospital should be built in Stonehaven. The postcards recognise the need to develop new health services in Stonehaven but express opposition to open competitive tendering for services. I suggest that the hon. Member approaches Grampian health board for information on representations made to the board. He will be aware that the board carried out

wide local consultation in preparing its specification for a new hospital and services. This provided the opportunity for expression of a wide variety of views.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Brian Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by the parliamentary constituency in which their home addresses are situated, the number of pupils currently benefiting from the assisted places scheme. [8182]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Information on the home addresses of assisted place pupils is not held centrally.

Newchurch and Company

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the consultancy contracts awarded by *(a)* Scottish health boards and *(b)* NHS trusts to Newchurch and Company in relation to private finance initiative contracts, indicating the value of each of those contracts. [8113]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Newchurch and Company is providing financial advice in connection with private finance exploration on only two projects in Scotland:

Hairmyres and Stonehouse NHS Trust—new district general hospital

Dumfries and Galloway Acute and Maternity NHS Trust—day case and maternity unit.

Both contracts were awarded following a competitively tendered process. The values are not known centrally as this is a commercial agreement between the trust and Newchurch.

Oil Spillages

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has on the oil spillage between Aberdeen and Neuburgh; how many sea birds and mammals have been affected; and what resources are being made available to rescue animals. [7655]

Mr. Norris: I have been asked to reply. I have asked the chief executive of the Coastguard Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Mr. Tony Banks, dated 9 January 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Question about oil spillages between Aberdeen and Neuburgh and the affect on sea birds and mammals.

PQ 5C/95/96

On Sunday, 10 December, the Marine Pollution Control Unit was informed that oiled birds were coming ashore between Aberdeen and Neuburgh. About 25 guillemots were affected of which eleven were cleaned. The remaining thirteen either died or had to be destroyed. The Scottish Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals was responsible for collecting the oiled birds from the beaches. No sea mammals were affected. No oil was washed ashore or sighted at sea.

Occupational Health

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many medical and nursing staff worked in occupational health within the NHS for the last three years for which figures are available; and what were the grades of these employees. [5152]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 13 December 1995]:* The number of medical and nursing staff working in occupation health within the NHS at 30 September 1993, 1994 and 1995 is shown in the table.

Medical staff	*1993*	*1994*	*[1]1995*
Consultant	10	11	10
Staff grade	2	2	2
Senior registrar	1	3	1
Hospital practitioner	1	1	1
Part-time medical officers (paragraph 94 appointments)	22	21	18
Total	36	38	32

[1] Provisional.

Nursing staff	*1993*	*1994*	*[1]1995*
Grade I	6	6	5
Grade H	16	15	15
Grade G	24	30	30
Grade F	9	15	14
Grade E	6	8	6
Grade D	—	1	—
Total	61	75	70

[1] At 31 March 1995; data for 30 September not available.

Most of the medical staff working in occupational health in the NHS do so on a part-time basis.

Medical Devices

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many incidents reported to the Common Services Agency *(a)* involving infusion devices, *(b)* involving over-infusion by infusion devices and *(c)* involving fatalities with infusion devices have occurred (i) since the start of 1985, (ii) between August 1993 and November 1994 and (iii) since August 1993. [5963]

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: The information requested is as follows:

Time period	*(a) Infusion devices (all incidents)*	*(b) Over-infusion*	*(c) Fatality*
(i) From 1985 to present	46	29	5
(ii) From end August 1993 to November 1994	7	5	[1]0
(iii) From August 1993 to present	20	15	[2]1

[1] A fatality involving an infusion pump was reported to Scottish Healthcare Supplies in March 1994. The fatality was later attributed to causes unrelated to the pump and the incident is not included here.
[2]The fatality listed here was reported to SHS on 8 June 1995. Two infusion pumps used to treat the patient were examined by SHS and a technical report is currently with the Procurator Fiscal. The fiscal has confirmed his conclusion that the fatality was not a result of over-infusion and this incident is not included in the column (b).

Press and Public Relations Officers

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many press and public relations officers worked for the Scottish Office in *(a)* 1978, *(b)* 1992 and *(c)* 1995; and what was the annual cost of these posts in each year. [6081]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 13 December 1995]:* The number of press and public relations officers employed in the Scottish Office information directorate at 1 April in the years 1978, 1992 and 1995 were 23, 27, and 27 respectively.

The total annual salary bill for all staff in the information directorate, including administrative support grades, was £965,361 in 1991–92 and £1,031,836 in 1994–95. The figure for 1977–78 is not available.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide for schemes so far agreed under the PFI the level of financing costs above the current cost of Government borrowing for the scheme with *(a)* the highest financing costs and *(b)* the lowest costs. [5719]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The information is not available in the form requested. It is a fundamental principle of the private finance initiative that when schemes are considered, the overall best value for money in providing a specified service is assessed, taking into account all aspects of design, building, finance and operation as a unified whole.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide a breakdown of administration costs incurred to date and forecast for the future on PFI work. [5736]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The estimated administrative costs of the Scottish Office private finance unit from 1993–94 to 1996–97 are as follows:

1993–94: £38,000
1994–95: £63,000
1995–96: £80,000
1996–97: £125,000.

Costs are incurred in addition by Scottish Office policy divisions and agencies and by the NHS management executive in taking forward PFI projects in their particular areas but these are not identified separately from other administrative work or from the costs which would have been incurred in taking forward conventional projects. Administrative costs specifically incurred by other public bodies on PFI work are also not separately quantifiable.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide revenue forecasts for the current year and the next five years of expenditure on schemes provided under the PFI. [5737]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The revenue consequences across all Scottish Office programmes of PFI projects over the three years 1996–97 to 1998–99 are estimated at approximately £140 million in total. These estimates are assumed to include financing, operating, maintenance and all other relevant revenue costs. In practice the size and timing of payments depend on the timing of agreement to, and completion of, contracts and on the delivery of specific services to specified standards.

Prescription Charges

Mr. George Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much was raised through the levying of prescriptions charged by each health board in Scotland in each financial year since 1979–80. [6155]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The information for each health board for the financial years 1979–80 to 1994–95 is set out in the table below. The table shows NHS receipts from prescription charges paid by patients in respect of drugs and appliances and prescription charges recovered from patients under health board post-dispensing checking arrangements.

The purchase of prescription pre-payments certificates is not deemed to be the payment of a charge under the NHS (Charges for Drugs and Appliances) (Scotland) Regulations 1989, as amended. These receipts are therefore not shown.

Health board	*1979–80* £	*1980–81* £	*1981–82* £	*1982–83* £	*1983–84* £	*1984–85* £	*1985–86* £	*1986–87* £
Argyll and Clyde	361,984	654,993	839,544	978,013	1,050,524	1,139,261	1,244,913	1,541,503
Ayrshire and Arran	344,877	543,678	805,826	863,823	916,197	983,569	1,097,596	1,258,265
Borders	77,866	143,945	180,320	215,894	234,704	261,627	305,637	357,926
Dumfries and Galloway	115,805	184,775	260,017	309,078	340,806	364,014	411,166	529,758
Fife	281,440	450,802	638,069	741,875	811,065	874,511	977,389	1,290,751
Forth Valley	221,844	398,973	517,782	604,889	664,162	713,950	789,965	998,607
Grampian	379,213	696,876	907,565	1,112,691	1,216,002	1,381,119	1,599,033	1,841,974
Greater Glasgow	789,443	1,398,192	1,743,182	1,960,743	2,102,009	2,220,729	2,344,749	2,840,176
Highland	142,481	261,926	337,880	394,090	433,661	462,513	516,948	639,028
Lanarkshire	480,368	861,032	1,103,182	1,261,896	1,362,351	1,471,735	1,601,002	1,935,899
Lothian	562,167	909,458	1,283,843	1,500,822	1,633,670	1,774,271	1,999,526	2,539,710
Orkney	12,892	23,175	30,774	37,365	38,331	43,098	70,018	80,435
Shetland	21,622	42,291	45,832	46,375	44,717	50,399	59,086	73,169
Tayside	301,176	544,606	678,014	817,992	873,748	966,408	1,091,185	1,369,588
Western Isles	17,812	30,756	45,661	48,592	52,460	57,889	63,731	69,369
Total	4,110,990	7,145,478	9,417,491	10,894,138	11,774,407	12,765,093	14,171,944	17,366,158

Health board	1987–88 £	1988–89 £	1989–90 £	1990–91 £	1991–92 £	1992–93 £	1993–94 £	1994–95 £
Argyll and Clyde	1,401,971	1,619,931	1,664,327	1,739,909	1,909,549	2,034,494	2,165,136	2,293,714
Ayrshire and Arran	1,343,944	1,363,265	1,493,341	1,599,391	1,720,195	1,825,740	1,992,347	2,099,886
Borders	361,707	418,690	432,012	460,828	507,546	566,992	639,116	690,134
Dumfries and Galloway	506,040	591,008	616,088	650,903	731,447	790,551	889,771	947,752
Fife	1,127,660	1,224,895	1,367,947	1,451,579	1,634,243	1,752,818	1,799,866	2,224,604
Forth Valley	920,575	1,059,355	1,088,334	1,165,445	1,300,438	1,401,513	1,596,432	1,709,598
Grampian	2,043,973	2,006,440	2,205,824	2,399,868	2,694,810	3,039,443	3,331,274	3,703,506
Greater Glasgow	2,525,368	2,694,145	2,847,550	2,945,034	3,142,277	3,307,852	3,500,011	3,714,678
Highland	570,729	715,553	765,988	847,790	959,670	1,042,665	1,119,967	1,249,931
Lanarkshire	1,769,306	1,918,087	2,115,452	2,155,476	2,359,297	2,520,036	2,742,741	2,839,487
Lothian	2,352,445	2,550,357	3,037,177	3,031,138	3,337,516	3,626,777	4,053,025	4,395,732
Orkney	75,240	85,649	87,711	105,903	119,597	240,408	164,042	159,794
Shetland	73,797	79,223	83,269	105,137	103,192	113,651	130,688	137,164
Tayside	1,289,796	1,399,856	1,536,510	1,658,357	1,830,338	2,011,229	2,206,634	2,371,206
Western Isles	79,929	71,498	77,870	86,351	87,519	99,184	114,418	135,618
Total	16,442,480	17,797,952	19,419,400	20,403,109	22,437,634	24,373,353	26,445,468	28,672,804

Departmental Staff (Members' Letters)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many officials he employed *(a)* full time and *(b)* part time in his Department in each of the last three years to answer letters sent to him from hon. Members; and what was the estimated overall cost of replying to them in each of the last three years. [5608]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* Any letters from hon. Members are passed to the appropriate Department for reply and this is regarded as part of the normal duties of staff in the Scottish Office. It is not possible to say how many staff have been engaged in answering letters or to provide an estimated overall cost.

NHS Advertising

Mr. George Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what sums have been spent on advertising by each NHS trust and health board in each year since 1990. [7168]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Scottish Homes Development Programme

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much Scottish Homes has spent through its development programme in each of the past five years, in cash terms and at 1995–96 prices. [6687]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The information requested is set out in the table:

Scottish Homes development programme

£ million

Year	Cash terms	1995–96 prices
1990–91	203.0	241.8
1991–92	235.0	263.5
1992–93	282.7	304.5
1993–94	306.6	320.9
1994–95	319.5	328.1

Young Homeless (London)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received from Shelter Scotland about young homeless in London. [7152]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: On its publication in November, Shelter sent me a copy of the Shelter/Borderline report, "When the Bright Lights Go Out: Young Homeless Scots in London 1995". I shall arrange for a copy of my reply to be placed in the Library.

Hospital Patients

Mr. George Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the average number of patients per hospital bed in Scotland in each major speciality in each year since 1989–90; and what was the percentage change over the entire period. [7170]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is shown in the table:

NHS in Scotland hospitals—throughput by selected specialty: years ending 31 March

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Percentage change 1990–95
Accident and emergency	106.7	111.3	110.7	131.9	161.8	151.9	42.4
Cardiothoracic surgery	33.1	31.6	32.9	33.0	33.7	35.6	7.6
Communicable diseases	26.8	31.7	30.2	29.6	31.5	34.2	27.6
Ear, nose and throat surgery	67.7	68.6	69.3	76.0	80.9	82.6	22.0
General medicine[1]	36.4	37.7	39.9	42.5	45.9	48.5	33.2
General practice	17.4	18.2	19.1	18.0	17.7	18.8	8.0
General surgery	39.4	40.5	43.0	45.0	47.6	50.0	26.9
Geriatric assessment	9.8	10.2	10.8	11.3	11.9	12.0	22.4
Gynaecology	60.3	61.1	62.6	63.4	63.7	66.6	10.4

NHS in Scotland hospitals—throughput by selected specialty: years ending 31 March

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	Percentage change 1990–95
Intensive therapy unit	85.9	94.7	99.7	99.1	92.3	93.9	9.3
Mental illness	2.7	2.9	3.4	3.8	4.1	4.4	63.0
Neurology	28.8	37.9	41.7	42.7	43.0	47.3	64.2
Neurosurgery	31.5	32.5	32.4	32.8	35.1	36.6	16.2
Ophthalmology	43.1	45.7	50.5	57.3	61.8	63.3	46.9
Oral surgery and medicine	91.4	88.5	90.3	99.6	103.1	99.9	9.3
Orthopaedic surgery	25.4	27.4	28.1	30.6	32.3	33.3	31.1
Paediatric medicine	60.7	65.2	68.2	69.4	77.7	77.7	28.0
Paediatric surgery	57.0	60.0	58.9	58.8	61.8	66.8	17.2
Plastic surgery	34.8	36.6	40.1	44.8	46.9	47.8	37.4
Radiotherapy	29.9	31.0	32.1	34.7	31.9	33.3	11.4
Respiratory medicine	24.5	25.7	30.8	31.0	35.0	37.7	53.9
Special care baby unit	23.6	23.3	21.0	21.5	20.9	21.5	-8.9
Specialist obstetrics	52.5	56.6	58.1	60.4	64.1	65.9	25.5
Urology	50.4	51.0	53.7	55.3	58.6	61.2	21.4

[1] Comprises specialities of general medicine, cardiology, metabolic diseases, gastroenterology, poisons, nephrology, rheumatology, genito-urinary medicine, medical oncology, haematology, homeopathy and tuberculosis non-respiratory.

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the average length of in-patient hospital stay for each specialty in each year since 1989–90. [7171]

Mr. Forsyth: The information requested is shown in the table:

NHS hospitals in Scotland—mean stay (days) by speciality: years ending 31 March

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Accident and emergency	2.1	2.0	1.9	1.7	1.3	1.2
Acute mixed	36.6	0.7	—	4.0	—	—
Adolescent psychiatry	109.4	63.2	59.9	69.9	70.8	63.7
Cardiothoracic surgery	8.4	8.7	8.0	8.1	8.0	7.5
Child psychiatry	112.1	102.6	106.4	125.5	79.4	72.4
Communicable diseases	7.0	6.5	6.5	6.3	5.9	5.7
Dermatology	14.5	14.1	15.4	14.7	14.6	14.1
Ear, nose and throat surgery	3.2	3.1	3.0	2.8	2.7	2.5
General medicine[1]	8.4	7.9	7.5	7.1	6.6	6.2
General practice	16.2	15.1	14.7	14.9	15.4	14.7
General surgery	6.6	6.4	6.1	5.9	5.6	5.4
Geriatric assessment	33.4	31.4	29.3	28.2	27.0	26.8
GP obstetrics	3.5	3.2	3.1	3.0	3.0	2.6
Gynaecology	3.7	3.5	3.5	3.3	3.3	3.3
Intensive therapy unit	2.8	2.6	2.5	2.5	2.7	2.7
Mental illness	113.4	106.1	90.6	83.0	77.4	72.2
Neurology	8.2	7.4	6.8	6.5	6.5	5.6
Neurosurgery	8.4	8.3	8.3	8.1	8.0	7.8
Ophthalmology	5.1	4.7	4.3	3.7	3.2	2.7
Oral surgery and medicine	2.3	2.3	2.3	2.1	2.1	2.1
Orthodontics and paediatric dentistry	1.0	1.7	1.6	1.0	1.2	0.9
Orthopaedic surgery	10.2	9.5	9.2	8.4	8.0	7.6
Other	11.3	11.5	11.0	11.8	11.1	6.0
Paediatric medicine	3.9	3.7	3.5	3.3	3.0	2.8
Paediatric surgery	3.7	3.6	3.6	3.4	3.2	3.4
Plastic surgery	6.7	6.3	5.8	5.4	5.2	5.0
Radiotherapy	9.5	9.3	9.1	8.4	9.0	8.7
Rehabilitation medicine	24.9	31.3	24.3	24.6	28.3	27.6
Respiratory medicine	11.3	10.5	9.2	9.1	8.3	8.0
Special care baby unit	7.8	8.3	9.2	8.8	9.1	9.4
Specialist[2] obstetrics	4.4	4.1	3.9	3.6	3.5	3.4
Spinal paralysis	54.6	50.6	48.7	46.1	38.2	41.2
Urology	5.5	5.3	5.1	4.8	4.6	4.4
Young chronic sick	137.8	120.9	97.7	97.4	82.6	62.1

[1] Comprises specialties of general medicine, cardiology, metabolic diseases, gastroenterology, poisons, nephrology, rheumatology, genito-urinary medicine, medical oncology, haematology, homeopathy and tuberculosis non-respiratory.

Skye Bridge

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library the full terms of the contractual agreement between Her Majesty's Government and the Skye Bridge Company, or its parent company. [7234]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The contractual agreements between the Secretary of State and Skye Bridge Limited which set out the terms for the design, construction, operation and maintenance of the Skye bridge project are commercial agreements. It is therefore not appropriate that they be treated in the way requested by the hon. Member. However, the key terms of the agreement are set out in the assignation statement made under the Assignation Statement (Prescribed Information) (Scotland) Regulations 1991, which was placed in the Library in December 1992 following an earlier request from the hon. Member.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will arrange for advance signs to be placed on the trunk road approaches to the Skye Bridge, indicating the level of tolls. [7236]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The levels of tolls for the Skye bridge are clearly displayed in the immediate approaches to the bridge. Signs more remote from the bridge area make it clear that the bridge is tolled. There is no reason for additional information on these signs which also convey a range of other route information.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the annual loss to the Treasury over *(a)* 15 years and *(b)* 25 years, of compensating the Skye Bridge Company, or its parent company, for removal of tolls from the Skye bridge, while retaining its maintenance responsibilities. [7235]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No such estimates have been made. The Skye bridge was planned and promoted as a privately financed and operated toll bridge and it will continue on that basis.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the single crossing charge for cars on all toll bridges in Scotland. [7237]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The single crossing charges on all toll bridges in Scotland are as follows:

	Single car toll	*Regular user concession/discount*
Forth road bridge	40p	36p—available on purchase of 100 vouchers
Erskine bridge	60p	54p—available on purchase of 50 vouchers
Tay road bridge	[1]80p	n/a
Skye bridge	£5.20 (high season) £4.30 (low season)	£2.44—available on purchase of 10 tickets

[1] Applies for travel north to south only; travel in other direction is untolled.

NHS Trusts

Mr. George Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much each NHS trust in Scotland spent on non-NHS provision in each year since 1991–92. [7167]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is not held centrally.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current establishment of his Department; and what it was in each of the past five years. [6832]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 20 December 1995]:* The number of permanent staff, full-time equivalent, in the Scottish Office core and its executive agencies is shown in the table. The figures relate to 1 April in the years from 1991 to 1995.

	Core Scottish Office	*Scottish Office executive agencies[1] including Scottish Prison Service*
1991	5,475.0	4,811.0
1992	5,147.5	5,213.0
1993	4,923.0	5,800.0
1994	4,835.0	5,697.5
1995	4,217.0	5,542.7

[1] A number of agencies were created during the period in question. Prior to creation, their staffing would be counted under the SO core.

Nursery Voucher Scheme

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the projected cost of the nursery voucher scheme in 1996–97. [6833]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 20 December 1995]:* The pre-school vouchers initiative will receive £3 million of new funding in 1996–97.

Textile Industry

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many workers were employed in the textile industry in Scotland in each of the past five years; and if he will provide a breakdown by district. [7265]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 20 December 1995]:* Information for Scotland is as follows:

Employees in employment in Scotland in the textile[1] industry

Year	*Number of employees*
1989	27,300
1991	25,600
1993	23,200

Note:

[1] There is a discontinuity between 1991 and 1993. 1989 and 1991 figures are for class 43 of the 1980 Standard Industrial Classification, the 1993 figure is for division 17 of the 1992 Standard Industrial Classification.

Source:

Census of Employment, Central Statistical Office.

Information at district level, where it is available, is on the NOMIS database in the House of Commons Library. Library staff are ready to assist in accessing the information if necessary. Confidentiality restrictions mean that employment information will not be available for districts with few textile employers.

Dounreay (Nuclear Emergencies)

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what emergency plans exist for the evacuation and decontamination of the area surrounding Dounreay in the event of a nuclear accident. [7291]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 20 December 1995]:* United Kingdom Automatic Energy Authority emergency procedures are exercised regularly, in liaison with the emergency services, the local authority, central Government and other agencies as necessary. The off-site response is co-ordinated by the police who, with other emergency services and Highland regional council, have plans for managing the off-site aspects of any civil nuclear emergency at Dounreay.

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the gross domestic product for Scotland for the past five years; and if he will provide a breakdown by sector. [7246]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 20 December 1995]:* Provisional data for 1994, together with information for 1991–93, will be published in an article called "Regional Accounts 1994, Part 1" in the December 1995 edition of *Economic Trends*. This will be available in the House of Commons Library from 29 December. Library staff are ready to assist in accessing information for earlier years.

Data covering years to 1993, now about to be revised, were published in the December 1994 edition of *Economic Trends*.

Abnormal Loads

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many abnormal loads involving railway locomotives and rolling stock have been notified to police authorities for escort on roads since the introduction of track charges by Railtrack; and how many of such loads were notified during the equivalent period before that date. [7735]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Consistent information about such movements is available only for the area of Strathclyde police and is as follows:

1995 (1 April to 20 December): 200

1994 (1 April to 20 December): 107.

Meat Inspectors

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many meat inspectors were employed in each region since 1990.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: At June 1995 the number of meat inspectors employed by the Meat Hygiene Service in each regional or islands council area of Scotland was as follows.

Region/islands council	*Number of meat inspectors*
Borders	5
Central	4
Dumfries and Galloway	7
Fife	1
Grampian	34
Highland	1
Lothian	17
Strathclyde	19
Tayside	18
Orkney Islands	2
Shetlands	Nil
Western Isles	Nil
Total	108

Prior to the establishment of the Meat Hygiene Service such information was not collected centrally.

Internet

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what web site his Department maintains on the Internet; what information is provided there; how often it is updated; what is the address; and if he or his Department answer questions and supply additional information through the Internet. [7572]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office has made available to the public via the Government information service world wide web server information on a number of aspects of its work. The address of the Scottish Office home page is http://www.open.gov.uk/scotoff/scofhom.htm. The information available is extended and revised from time to time. It currently covers:

The responsibilities and organisation of the Scottish Office;

Summaries of the available Scottish Office factsheets;

The structure of the new unitary local authorities;

Higher education policy;

Rural affairs and natural heritage policy with electronic links to the recently published White Paper, "Rural Scotland: People, Prosperity and Partnership";

Links to information on educational research in Scotland;

Outlines of the functions of the social work services group and Her Majesty's industrial pollution inspectorate.

There is provision for direct e-mail response within the rural affairs and higher education policy pages to enable Internet users to submit questions and seek further information. Replies may also be sent by electronic mail.

Algrade Trust

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what payments were made by his Department from April 1981 to December 1994 to the Algrade Trust in respect of the care and accommodation of handicapped people at Humbie, East Lothian; and what estimate he has made of the proportion of that money which was spent on such care and accommodation by the Algrade Trust. [3261]

Mr. Roger Evans: I have been asked to reply.

This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will reply to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. John Home Robertson, dated 20 December 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about what payments were made by his Department from April 1981 to December 1994 to the Algrade Trust in respect of the care and accommodation of handicapped people at Humbie, East Lothian; and what estimate he has made of the proportion of that money which was spent on such care and accommodation by the Algrade Trust.

Details of payments for the period April 1981 to November 1986 could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Appendices A–H give details of the amounts issued in respect of the period from 1 December 1986 to 30 January 1995. The payment made in January 1995 has been included as it covers the period from 1 November 1994 to 30 January 1995.

Payments to the Algrade Trust were made in respect of care, accommodation, meals and personal expenses. It is not possible therefore to give details of the payments made for care and accommodation only.

The Secretary of State discharges his responsibilities for the administration of benefit once he has made payments to the customer or appropriate body.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Payments made to the Algrade Trust during the periods January 1987–January 1995

Appendix A

Payment up to and including	*Amount paid £*
1987	
3 January	£5,945.33
31 January	2,982.88
28 February	2,570.48
4 April	3,209.35
2 May	2,567.68
30 May	2,567.68
4 July	3,209.60
1 August	2,567.68
5 September	3,209.60
3 October	2,567.68
31 October	2,567.68
5 December	3,209.60

Appendix B

Payment up to and including	*Amount paid £*
1988	
2 January	2,607.68
30 January	2,567.68
5 March	3,241.60
2 April	2,567.68
30 April	2,568.58
4 June	3,211.10
2 July	2,568,88
30 July	2,568.88
3 September	3,211.10
1 October	2,568.88
5 November	3,211.10
3 December	3,207.08
31 December	3,257.08

Appendix C

Payment up to and including	*Amount paid £*
1989	
4 February	4,008.85
4 March	3,207.08
1 April	3,207.08
29 April	[1]17,491.53
3 June	27,831.65
1 July	22,265.32
5 August	27,931.65
2 September	25,198.05
30 September	24,308.96
4 November	31,086.40
2 December	24,308.96
30 December	24,368.96

[1] Increase in the number of residents from 5 to 35.

Appendix D

Payment up to and including	*Amount paid £*
1990	
3 February	30,386.20
3 March	24,010.36
31 March	23,787.76
5 May	29,805.70
4 June	26,088.88
2 July	24,393.36

Appendix D

Payment up to and including	*Amount paid £*
30 July	23,651.16
3 September	30,039.66
1 October	24,285.44
5 November	30,356.89
3 December	23,470.44
31 December	23,410.44

Appendix E

Payment up to and including	*Amount paid £*
1991	
4 February	29,263.05
4 March	23,410.44
1 April	23,410.44
29 April	23,482.75
3 June	29,928.00
1 July	23,942.40
29 July	23,942.40
26 August	23,942.40
30 September	29,928.00
28 October	23,942.40
25 November	23,280 32
30 December	28,896.00

Appendix F

Payment up to and including	*Amount paid £*
1992	
27 January	23,942.40
24 February	23,942.40
23 March	23,942.40
27 April	31,737.60
25 May	26,355.20
29 June	32,944.00
27 July	26,355.20
31 August	32,944.00
28 September	25,446.40
26 October	25,446.40
30 November	31,808.00
28 December	25,506.40

Appendix G

Payment up to and including	*Amount paid £*
1993	
25 January	25,446.40
22 February	25,446.40
29 March	31,808.00
26 April	25,101.90
31 May	33,271.00
28 June	26,616.80
26 July	26,616.80
30 August	33,271.00
27 September	26,616.80
25 October	26,616.80
29 November	33,271.00
27 December	26,686.80

Appendix H

Payment up to and including	*Amount Paid* £
1994	
31 January 1994	33,983.95
28 February 1994	26,616.80
28 March 1994	26,911.86
25 April 1994	27,639.02
30 May 1994	35,088.90
27 June 1994	28,071.12
25 July 1994	28,071.12
29 August 1994	35,088.90
31 October 1994	63,160.02
30 January 1995	90,740.94

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Nursery Education

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on progress on provision of nursery education for all four-year-olds. [4126]

Mr. Robin Squire *[pursuant to his reply, 13 December 1995, Official Report c. 701]:* I said that the Government had consulted on a number of issues related to the operation of the scheme and would publish their conclusions early in the new year.

The Government are today publishing the document "Nursery Education Scheme: The Next Steps". In parallel with this, the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority is publishing its document "Nursery Education: Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning on Entering Compulsory Education".

The two documents outline the quality assurance arrangements for the nursery voucher scheme. They cover inspection, including the frequency of inspection and an inspection framework based on the SCAA's learning outcomes; entry to the scheme; staff, qualifications and training; the length of sessions; premises and equipment; the publication of information for parents; and special educational needs.

Copies of a pack containing the documents have been placed in the Vote Office and Library. Copies are being distributed to nursery education providers, local authorities, education bodies and other interests.

The Government and the SCAA are grateful to all those who responded to the consultation papers. Careful consideration was given to all comments received.

Mr. Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the average cost per pupil of existing local authority nursery education provision in the United Kingdom. [8277]

Mr. Squire: The average unit cost per full-time equivalent pupil for those categories of under-fives provision for which estimates are available for England are given in the table. Corresponding figures are not available on a United Kingdom basis.

1993–94 estimates; England only

	£
Nursery schools	3,250
Nursery classes in primary schools	2,660
Primary classes including under 5s	1,590
Average	2,040

Student Loans

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 4 December, *Official Report,* column *119,* on student loans, what timetable is expected for the tendering process for the contract to establish a new central database for the processing of student loans; and when a draft tender document will be drawn up. [5775]

Mr. Forth: The timetables for the tendering exercise and the draft tender documents for the provision of a central database have yet to be finalised.

Ministerial Transport and Accommodation Costs

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her estimate of the total cost for herself and other departmental Ministers for each year since 1991–92, including the current year of *(a)* overseas travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers and their advisers, *(b)* car and chauffeuring costs of Ministers, *(c)* ministerial security costs and *(d)* domestic travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers. [6394]

Mr. Robin Squire: For expenditure under category *(a)* I would refer the hon. Member to the replies given by my hon. Friends to the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) on 5 and 6 July 1995, *Official Report,* columns *233* and *360* respectively. For expenditure under category *(b)* I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) on 8 November 1995, *Official Report,* column *934.* No extra departmental costs have been incurred under category *(c).* Information on expenditure for the remaining category *(d)* is not collected in the format requested. However this information, together with planned expenditure for the current financial year in respect of all categories, is included in the running costs expenditure of the former Employment and Education Departments, which is published in the respective departmental annual reports.

Departmental Running Costs

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her estimate of the cost of running her departmental office, and that of her predecessor, for each year since 1990–91, including the current year, broken down into *(a)* telephone bills, *(b)* total staff costs, *(c)* press and communications, *(d)* entertainment, *(e)* alcoholic drinks, *(f)* non-alcoholic drinks, *(g)* stationery, *(h)* office refurbishment and *(i)* other. [6393]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information on expenditure in each of the last five years, and for the current financial year, is not collected in the format requested but is included in the running cost expenditure of the former Employment and Education Departments, which is published in the respective departmental annual reports.

Departmental Staff (Members' Letters)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many officials she employed *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time in her Department in each of the last three years to answer letters sent to her from hon. Members; and what was the estimated overall cost of replying to them in each of the last three years. [5613]

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* The Department for Education and Employment employs no staff exclusively to answer letters from hon. Members. Answers are prepared by a large number of officials as part of their normal duties. No estimate is readily available of the current overall cost of replies. In 1994, the former DFE Ministers received almost 13,000 letters—including all ministerial letters and those from hon. Members. In the same year, the former Employment Department received nearly 7,000 letters from hon. Members.

Redundant Defence Workers

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when her Department's joint study into the experiences and prospects of redundant defence workers will report. [6346]

Mr. Robin Squire: It is expected to be available at the end of February.

Disability Discrimination

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what calculation or estimate she has made of the percentage of employers to whom the employment provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 will not apply. [7426]

Mrs. Gillan: The employment provisions of the Act do not apply to those employers who employ fewer than 20 employees. This will therefore exclude about 96 per cent. of employers.

However, it is more relevant that 80 per cent. of employees work for employers who will be within the scope of the employment provisions of the Act.

Merseyside Training and Enterprise Council

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what is the budget of Merseyside TEC in *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97; [7931]

(2) if he will list the members of the board of Merseyside TEC, their relevant previous experience and dates of appointment. [7932]

Mr. Paice: The Government office for Merseyside contracted with Merseyside training and enterprise council for expenditure of £42.44 million in 1995–96. Negotiations for the 1996–97 contract are due to start shortly and no figure is available presently.

The members of the board of Merseyside TEC are:

Name	*Date of appointment*
Mr. L. Howell	17 December 1990
Mr. T. Atherton	7 September 1995
Mr. M. H. Bennett	10 January 1991
Mrs. L. J. Bloomfield	19 November 1990
Mr. I. H. Carnall	4 July 1994
Mr. M. F. Cogley	23 April 1990
Mr R. Currie	5 April 1993
Mr. G. J. Haywood	13 September 1993
Mr. D. G Henshaw	23 April 1990
Mr. R. W. Lofthouse	23 April 1990
Mr. A. Lowe	23 April 1990
Mr. R. I. S. Meadows	9 January 1992
Mr. I. S Parr	28 February 1995
Mr. L. Sterling	12 November 1992

The basic requirement for membership of a TEC board is that the person holds the office of chairman or chief executive or top level operational manager at local level of a company within the private sector or their equivalents from education, economic development, trade unions, voluntary organisations or the public sector. The members of the Merseyside TEC board meet this requirement.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many mobile telephones have been supplied to her Department in each of the last eight years; and in each of those years how many different suppliers were involved. [8034]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Teachers

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many full-time teachers are currently employed in schools in England. [8077]

Mr. Robin Squire: There were 353,717 full-time qualified teachers employed in maintained schools in England in January 1995, the latest date for which information is available.

Advisers

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many civil servants and educational advisers are employed in her Department. [8076]

Mr. Robin Squire: The total number of permanent civil servants and educational advisers employed in the Department for Education and Employment on 1 October 1995, the most recent date for which statistics are available, is 5,812.

Local Education Authority Spending

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what has been the total discretionary award expenditure as a percentage of LEA spending for each authority in England and Wales. [7989]

Mr. Forth: Information is not available in the form requested. the following table shows local education authority expenditure on discretionary awards in the academic year 1993–94 and total net recurrent local authority expenditure on education in the financial year 1993–94. Because the figures for discretionary awards expenditure and net recurrent expenditure are not directly comparable, it is not possible to calculate the percentage of total expenditure which is attributable to discretionary awards.

Information on total local authority expenditure on education in Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Expenditure by local education authorities: England and Wales

£000s

	Expenditure on discretionary awards[1,2] in the academic year 1993–94	*Total expenditure on education[3] in the financial year 1993–94*
Corporation of London	24	2,010
Camden[4]	—	70,054
Greenwich	349	110,016
Hackney	991	119,730
Hammersmith and Fulham	178	67,408
Islington	184	95,862
Kensington and Chelsea	637	48,861
Lambeth	127	132,499
Lewisham	1,073	112,439
Southwark	273	110,026
Tower Hamlets	467	128,142
Wandsworth	1,162	90,517
Westminster[4]	—	68,714
London residuary body	76	—
Barking and Dagenham	299	63,996
Barnet	127	106,941
Bexley	409	78,360
Brent	497	112,369
Bromley	714	76,855
Croydon	609	129,818
Ealing	204	120,724
Enfield	357	108,683
Haringey	16	111,348
Harrow	103	90,142
Havering	654	78,692
Hillingdon	193	66,271
Hounslow	386	89,813
Kingston upon Thames	982	47,035
Merton	397	69,814
Newham	473	117,182
Redbridge	455	101,002
Richmond upon Thames	461	51,921
Sutton	157	50,665
Waltham Forest	246	104,155
Birmingham	1,725	444,977
Coventry	438	143,835
Dudley	175	104,926
Sandwell	198	126,253
Solihull	343	78,015
Walsall	537	109,676
Wolverhampton	67	113,059
Knowsley	816	75,815
Liverpool	2,200	215,497
St. Helens	507	78,433
Sefton	958	120,072
Wirral	2,066	143,280
Bolton	985	106,916
Bury	364	71,109
Manchester	2,363	206,603
Oldham	823	101,566

Expenditure by local education authorities: England and Wales

£000s

	Expenditure on discretionary awards[1,2] in the academic year 1993–94	*Total expenditure on education[3] in the financial year 1993–94*
Rochdale	819	86,296
Salford	143	87,880
Stockport	1,071	108,433
Tameside	452	82,741
Trafford	411	78,788
Wigan	524	122,115
Barnsley	412	81,927
Doncaster	754	128,186
Rotherham	1,002	109,264
Sheffield	692	187,044
Bradford	2,181	216,312
Calderdale	399	73,383
Kirklees	2,300	167,279
Leeds	3,231	280,208
Wakefield	504	121,896
Gateshead	762	83,661
Newcastle upon Tyne	890	113,508
North Tyneside	1,031	67,445
South Tyneside	647	62,279
Sunderland	1,296	120,975
Isles of Scilly	16	1,306
Avon	2,738	371,747
Bedfordshire	2,073	216,199
Berkshire	1,825	271,276
Buckinghamshire	924	256,096
Cambridgeshire	920	233,434
Cheshire	5,363	394,667
Cleveland	2,027	240,535
Cornwall	2,574	184,286
Cumbria	9,523	175,302
Derbyshire	3,491	351,727
Devon	4,726	366,006
Dorset	6,429	206,766
Durham	2,381	246,541
East Sussex	2,131	242,739
Essex	4,830	469,539
Gloucestershire	2,467	165,592
Hampshire	8,219	549,758
Hereford and Worcester	2,036	247,999
Hertfordshire	2,549	374,316
Humberside	3,462	367,792
Isle of Wight	459	49,584
Kent	8,728	502,510
Lancashire	7,301	594,252
Leicestershire	6,265	371,638
Lincolnshire	1,739	194,228
Norfolk	3,024	253,887
North Yorkshire	4,419	276,129
Northamptonshire	1,826	215,087
Northumberland	1,409	127,589
Nottinghamshire	2,896	414,002
Oxfordshire	1,285	215,518
Shropshire	1,702	159,908
Somerset	1,912	177,433
Staffordshire	1,114	382,274
Suffolk	2,535	240,229
Surrey	3,575	330,929
Warwickshire	12	183,502
West Sussex	1,856	252,300
Wiltshire	1,820	209,106
Clwyd	1,018	163,025
Dyfed	817	163,632
Gwent	3,393	199,150
Gwynedd	1,189	104,360
Mid-Glamorgan	1,584	257,223
Powys	647	56,220

Expenditure by local education authorities: England and Wales

£000s

	Expenditure on discretionary awards[1,2] in the academic year 1993–94	*Total expenditure on education[3] in the financial year 1993–94*
South Glamorgan	1,236	164,765
West Glamorgan	965	157,389
England and Wales[4]	184,132[5,6a]	19,901,208[7]

— = not available.

[1] Including major discretionary awards (paid at least 50% of the mandatory rate) and minor awards (paid at less than 50 per cent. of the mandatory rate).

[2] Including expenditure on fees for discretionary award placement year sandwich students.

[3] Net recurrent expenditure, i.e. total expenditure not including joint arrangements less capital charges, interest and capital expenditure charged to revenue account minus customer and client receipts and revenue for other LEAs for pupils and students educated by the authority.

[4] Camden and Westminster were unable to provide all of the information required on discretionary awards expenditure.

[5] Total is grossed to compensate for incomplete returns.

[6] Source: LEA returns on Form 503G.

[7] Source: LEA RO1 returns to the Department of the Environment.

Executive Agencies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if answers sent to hon. Members in reply to parliamentary questions by the head of executive agencies in her Department are *(a)* seen, *(b)* approved and *(c)* amended by her before they are sent; and if she will identify such letters to which amendments by her have been made in 1994–95. [7838]

Mr. Forth: The Department has two executive agencies—the Employment Service and the Teachers' Pensions Agency. Parliamentary questions are passed to the head of the relevant executive agency for reply when the matter is one delegated to him or her under the agency framework document. The relevant Minister may see a copy of the reply before it is sent, but would not normally intervene in operational matters.

No such answers were amended by Ministers in 1994–95.

Special Needs

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how the special educational needs code of practice arising from section 157(1) of the Education Act 1993 will be applied to small-scale voluntary daycare centres operating the proposed pre-school provision funded by education vouchers; and by what means she will ensure *(a)* that children with special educational needs will be considered for statementing and *(b)* that when statemented, full provision for their needs will be made available as a consequence. [8188]

Mr. Robin Squire: The responsibilities of local authorities to identify and make a statutory assessment of those children who probably need a statement, to make a statement where appropriate and to satisfy themselves that provision is made available in accordance with the statement, remain unchanged.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is considering making it a requirement for all voucher redeeming institutions to have regard to the special educational needs code of practice.

All nursery voucher redeeming institutions will be expected to include in published information for parents details of their special educational needs policy.

Pre-school Education

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to the answer of 7 December, *Official Report*, column *403*, what are the qualifications and current functions of those appointed to evaluate the first phase of the pre-school education scheme. [8193]

Mr. Robin Squire: Evaluation of the first phase of the nursery education voucher scheme will be led by officials of the Department.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment by what means she plans to ensure that additional facilities made available with the proposed voucher-based pre-school education scheme will not prejudice the operation of existing nursery schools and classes in the maintained system. [8189]

Mr. Squire: There is no reason why the voucher scheme should affect the operation of existing nursery schools and classes in the maintained sector. The proposed funding mechanism ensures that the maintained sector does not lose funding if recruitment of four-year-olds remains at present levels.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) for what purposes it is necessary to spend £5 million on the administration of the first phase of the pre-school education scheme taking place in four local authorities, and £20 million on the administration and inspection of the second phase of the pre-school education scheme which will operate in all local authorities in the United Kingdom; [8191]

(2) if she will estimate the proportion of the £5 million cost allocated to the first phase of the new pre-school education scheme which she does not expect to arise in the further extension of the scheme. [8192]

Mr. Squire: For the first and second phases of the nursery education voucher scheme, £5 million and £20 million respectively has been set aside for the new educational inspection programme for voucher redeeming establishments and the administration of the scheme. The vast majority of this funding will be spent on the inspection programme; the greater proportion of funding for the first phase will be spent on the recruitment and training of inspectors to carry out the inspections in the second phase.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will place in the Library the responses to her Department's consultation paper, "Quality Assurance Regime for Institutions which Redeem Pre-School Education Vouchers: Discussion Paper". [8194]

Mr. Squire: Yes. A summary of the responses will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment by what means the payment of the proposed pre-school voucher system will be accommodated within the academic and financial year structures of local authorities with special reference to the times that children will start attending primary school full-time. [8190]

Mr. Squire: Local education authorities participating in the first phase of the scheme will receive voucher income in a number of installments over the year in respect of voucher-bearing children in their schools.

Access to Work scheme

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will publish the guidance notes issued by the Employment Service to disability employment advisers following the implementation of changes made to the access to work scheme. [8146]

Mr. Paice: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Tom Clarke, dated 9 January 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about publishing Employment Service guidance notes issued to Disability Employment Advisers.

We do not as a matter of course publish our guidance notes. However, all guidance notes, including those issued to Disability Employment Advisers, are available to those who request them.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people have benefited from support through the access to work scheme during its first year of operation; and how many and what proportion of these have been unemployed *(a)* at the point of making a request for support and *(b)* when receiving support. [8149]

Mr. Paice: Some 10,023 disabled people were successfully helped by the access to work programme in its first operational year—6 June 1994 to 31 May 1995. Of these, 1,652 were unemployed when they applied. This represents less than 20 per cent. Access to work was launched with the specific aim of helping disabled people into work.

Mr. Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what action is being undertaken by her Department to monitor the effect of changes in the access to work scheme on disabled people. [8144]

Mr. Paice: The Employment Service will continue to monitor the access to work programme.

Mr. Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if a disabled person reassessed for support under new arrangements for the access to work scheme will be entitled to retain existing equipment if it is of continued usefulness. [8143]

Mr. Paice: Each case will need to be individually considered. It is likely though that a disabled person who has been reassessed for support will be able to retain existing equipment if it is of continued usefulness.

Mr. Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of the level of cost saving which will result from the introduction of changes to the access to work scheme for the period between 18 December 1995 and April 1996. [8147]

Mr. Paice: We have to ensure that expenditure remains within the resources available and is equitably shared. Additional funds have, however, already been allocated to the access to work budget for 1995–96 to ensure that we can keep helping disabled people until the end of the year.

Mr. Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on what grounds unemployed people can be supported through the access to work scheme. [8150]

Mr. Paice: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment announced on 14 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *738*, that, from 18 December 1995, help from access to work would be targeted on unemployed disabled people. Applications for assistance will be considered from disabled people who have not been in paid work for at least four weeks.

Mr. Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the eligibility for support under the access to work scheme between 18 December 1995 and April 1996 of *(a)* people who become disabled and wish to retain their present employment, but who have new needs, *(b)* disabled persons whose circumstances change due to changes in their present employment or to internal promotion, *(c)* disabled people in employment who apply for support under the access to work scheme for the first time, *(d)* disabled people who become self-employed, *(e)* disabled people in supported employment who develop new needs and *(f)* disabled people who have new needs stemming from changes to office systems and practices. [8145]

Mr. Paice: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Tom Clarke, dated 9 January 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about eligibility conditions for Access to Work.

The Secretary of State announced on 14 December that from 18 December Access to Work would be targeted on meeting existing commitments; to applications to renew arrangements which fully satisfied the programme's rules and criteria prior to 18 December and which would otherwise have lapsed; and to people with disabilities who have been unemployed for at least four weeks.

Disability Employment Advisers in Placing Assessment and Counselling Teams assess the work needs of disabled people and decide according to their individual needs and circumstances whether support can be given under Access to Work.

Whenever possible they agree the decision with the disabled person and their employer or potential employer.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of the number of unemployed people who will be assisted

through the access to work scheme between 18 December 1995 and April 1996. [8148]

Mr. Paice: Any reduction in the number of applications may be in line with research findings into access to work, which indicate that over 80 per cent. of all applications are from people already in paid employment.

School Closures

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what are her Department's guidelines for taking into account the environmental impact of the increased distances pupils must be driven to school when their local schools are closed. [8110]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department's circular on the supply of school places, 23/94 says that proposals for school closure should include details of the schools to receive displaced pupils and the arrangements that will be made for pupil transport.

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what extra resources the Government will be allocating to local authorities which already provide nursery education for four-year-olds to assist their transition to the nursery vouchers. [8278]

Mr. Robin Squire: The transitional costs for local authorities will be minimal because most of the voucher administration will be handled by a private company specifically appointed for the purpose.

Mr. Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her latest estimate of the cost of introducing nursery vouchers. [8276]

Mr. Squire: Based on current data, the total cost of the nursery education voucher scheme in 1997–98 is estimated at £750 million, of which £185 million will be new money made available by the Government.

Mr. Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many qualified nursery teachers and nursery nurses are required to provide nursery education to all those in receipt of vouchers; and if she will make a statement. [8280]

Mr. Squire: The number of qualified nursery teachers and nursery nurses that will be required will depend on the way in which parents exercise the choice which nursery vouchers gives them.

Educational Institution Governors

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the extent to which governors of educational institutions may become personally liable for acts of their institutions, making any required distinctions between governors of *(a)* schools, *(b)* sixth form colleges, *(c)* colleges of further education institutions and *(d)* universities. [8217]

Mr. Robin Squire: The governing bodies of all these institutions are statutory corporations and there is no significant distinction between the different categories of governor. The exception to this is the small number of designated further and higher education institutions conducted by unincorporated governing bodies. With this exception, the liability falls on the corporate governing body rather than on the individual members of the governing body. In practice, members of governing bodies will seldom incur individual personal liability. Provided individual governors act honestly and without ulterior motive, showing reasonable care and common sense within the scope of their functions and procedures, they will in practice be protected against any risk to their own assets as a result of the governing body's decisions.

Teachers (Early Retirement)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what studies she has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated in the last five years to assess the extent of early retirement of teachers in (i) primary and (ii) secondary schools from stress arising from their occupation; and what other measures she is taking to assess this problem. [8297]

Mr. Robin Squire: No studies have been commissioned or evaluated in the last five years. My right hon. Friend is currently considering this issue.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the statistics for the retirement of teachers eligible for retirement pensions from her Departmental scheme for each year since 1985, showing for each year *(a)* the total number each year and as a percentage of those in the schemes, *(b)* the total number aged (i) 50 to 55, (ii) 55 to 60 years and (iii) 60 to 65 and *(c)* the number and percentage retiring through voluntary or other redundancy or ill-health, respectively, indicating separately the figure for head teachers. [8296]

Mr. Squire: This information is not readily available. I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Local Education Authorities

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assistance her Department provides to local education authorities to assist them in *(a)* teacher recruitment and personal welfare, *(b)* inspection of and assistance to teacher and schools in their areas, *(c)* supply of equipment and materials for educational purposes, *(d)* in-service training for teachers and governors, *(e)* premises and services for special needs and *(f)* sports grounds and outdoor pursuits centres; and what plans Her Majesty's Government have for strengthening their capabilities and performance in respect of these roles. [8300]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department provides support for a variety of educational priorities through the grants for education support and training, including in-service training for teachers and governor training. Coverage is reviewing annually. The Department makes capital funding available for maintained special schools through the annual capital guidelines which it issues each year to LEAs; it also assists non-maintained special schools through an annual capital grant programme. The DFEE and its agencies provide a wide range of advisory circulars, leaflets and other information offering guidance to LEAs every year. More details about the specific

assistance and funding the Department provides to LEAs are shown in the departmental report, a copy of which has been deposited in the Library of the House.

Secondary Schools (Entry Qualifications)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidance or rules Her Majesty's Government will publish and forward to self-governing maintained middle or secondary schools concerning future entry qualifications of pupils other than those of domicile; what will be the minimum age of assessment; and by what means they will incorporate tests or estimates of *(a)* attainment and *(b)* future testable performance. [8295]

Mrs. Gillan: The governors of grant-maintained schools are responsible for their own admission arrangements. At present, however, those arrangements must be approved by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. She is now consulting on proposals to lift this requirement, so that grant-maintained schools have the same flexibility as that currently available to LEAs and to the governors of voluntary-aided schools.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Housing Benefit

Mr. George Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the numbers and amounts of rent rebate and rent allowance overpayments; and what percentage this was of local authorities' overall housing benefit expenditure for each district and island council in Scotland, in each year from 1991–92. [5054]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is in the Library.

National Insurance Numbers

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security *(a)* how many individuals are currently entitled to a national insurance number and *(b)* how many such numbers have actually been issued and remain currently valid; and what factors underlie the discrepancy between *(a)* and *(b)*. [5436]

Mr. Heald: There are approximately 65 million records held on the departmental central index database. All these numbers remain valid. Many relate to persons living abroad or to deceased persons whose dependants continue to receive benefits based on the deceased's national insurance contributions records.

Income Support

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will express the value of disregards within income support for earnings and for maintenance in cash and real terms since 1985 and the real terms figures *(a)* with 1985 as the based and *(b)* with the figures most recently issued by his Department as the base. [5481]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People on 18 December, *Official Report*, columns *887–90*, to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn).

There is no maintenance disregard in income support.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 6 December, *Official Report*, column *248*, how many of those estimated to qualify for the mobility component of disability living allowance at the *(a)* higher rate and *(b)* lower rate are in the age groups (i) 65 to 69 (ii) 70 to 74, (iii) 75 to 79 and (iv) 80 years or over. [5959]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The available information is in the table.

Disability living allowance	*Higher rate mobility component*	*Lower rate mobility component*
69 and under	150,000	10,000
70 to 74	340,000	20,000
75 to 79	420,000	10,000
80 and over	1,090,000	20,000
Total	2,000,000	60,000

Note:
Estimates are rounded to the nearest 10,000, they are speculative and subject to very substantial margins of error.
Source:
DLA statistics May 1995, OPCS Disability Survey 1985, Government Actuaries Department population projection 1992.

Funeral Payments

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations funeral directors have been made to him in respect of bad debts since changes in social security rules affecting funerals were implemented. [6060]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Although funeral directors have expressed the view that the changes to social fund funeral payments will result in debts, no specific examples have been received.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the levels of state assistance available to meet funeral expenses. [6058]

Mr. Mitchell: The social fund funeral payment scheme covers all reasonable costs of burial and cremation disbursements and in addition allows up to £500 for the funeral director's services, up to £75 because of a requirement of the religious faith of the deceased and up to £25 for flowers from the person arranging the funeral. Everyone who is entitled to help with arranging a funeral through the social fund is able to choose either a burial or cremation. Payments can, especially in the case of burials, exceed £1,000.

Local authorities in England and Wales have a duty under section 46 of the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 to arrange for the burial or cremation of the body of any person who has died or been found dead in their area where it appears to the authority that no suitable arrangements for the disposal of the body have been made. Similar provision applies in Scotland under section 50 of the National Assistance Act 1948.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the representatives of funeral directors he consulted before changing the amount of assistance given to people of limited means faced with funeral expenses. [6059]

Mr. Mitchell: Representatives from the Funeral Standards Council, the National Association of Funeral Directors and the Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what calculations underlay the sum of £500 as the maximum grant for funerals for relatives without means. [6057]

Mr. Mitchell: The average amount awarded for funeral directors' fees under the funeral payment scheme prior to June 1995 was £749. The current scheme restricts both the type of coffin and the number of cars which may be provided. Therefore, the amount awarded should also be

lower. It is reasonable to assume that, with the state meeting the cost of 12 per cent. of all funerals, there will be some price competition in the industry which will tend to exert a downward pressure on prices.

Survey information collected by funeral directors' associations was also helpful. The Secretary of State took full account of that evidence when making final decisions on the precise specification for the new social fund funeral payments scheme. However, after careful consideration he concluded that £500 was a fair award for funeral directors' services, balancing the needs of the funeral director, the customer, and the taxpayer.

Child Care Allowance

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he is taking to monitor the end use of child care allowance. [6077]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: In claims for family credit and disability working allowance, allowance is made for child care charges only after the information given by claimants is verified by the child care provider.

Child Support

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for what reasons the Government decided to increase the minimum payment under the Child Support Act 1991 from £2.35 to £4.80; what additional savings he expects to accrue to the budgets for each of the benefits administered by his Department as a result of this policy change; and what are the purposes to which these savings will be applied. [6185]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The proposed change will reinforce a key principle of the Child Support Act 1991 that parents are responsible for providing financial support for their children. Absent parents who are sick or disabled, or who have responsibility for children in their new family, will continue to be exempt from this payment.

Parents with care, and children, will benefit. Those parents receiving income support will build up a higher entitlement to the child maintenance bonus when it is introduced in April 1997 and others in work will gain straight away from the increased payment.

The long-term benefit savings, arising from reduced expenditure on income-related benefits paid to parents with care, are expected to be £15 million. Most of the savings will be in respect of income support.

The proposal forms part of the measures announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 29 November which will in total save around £1 billion in the long term and will help contain real annual growth in social security spending to 1.3 per cent. between 1996–97 and 1998–99.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many cases of *(a)* fraud and *(b)* alleged fraud, have arisen from the application of the Child Support Act 1991 to absent fathers who are self-employed. [7174]

Mr. Mitchell: It is not a business requirement of the Child Support Agency to keep statistics centrally on allegations to fraud. Any such allegation in respect of a self-employed absent parent is referred to the Contributions Agency for investigation.

Consultants

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the consultancies employed by his Department in the last five years, indicating *(a)* what the consultancies were for, *(b)* to whom the consultancies were awarded, *(c)* the total amount spent on each consultancy and *(d)* the total amount spent on each contract in the last five years. [6555]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows:

The Department's use of consultants is set against the background of a huge business with a major programme to deliver policy changes and business efficiencies.

Among other things consultants have been used to contribute to:

- Increasing efficiency;
- Market testing initiatives;
- Major structural changes following the creation of executive agencies;
- Introduction of new benefits;
- Development of information systems; and
- Implementation of Departmental programmes.

From July/August 1993, the DSS commenced using framework agreements for the procurement of management and IT consultancy. Framework agreements in respect of management consultancy and related services were awarded to the following companies:

- Andersen Consulting
- Coopers and Lybrand
- Ernst and Young
- EFD (Electronic Facilities Design)
- KPMG Peat Marwick
- Merz and McLellan
- PA Consulting
- P-E International
- Price Waterhouse.

Framework agreements in respect of IT consultancy and related services were awarded to the following companies:

- Admiral Management Services
- Andersen Consulting
- ASE Consulting
- Computer People Limited
- Coopers and Lybrand
- Cray Systems (P-E International)
- CSS Trident
- Easams
- EDS
- FI Group
- Hoskins
- IBM UK Ltd
- International Computers Ltd.
- Logica
- Methods Applications
- NEF Computer Services (Nesco)

PA Consulting
Parity Solutions
Price Waterhouse
Sema Group
Siemens Nixdorf
Taskforce Group plc.

Most contracts let since August 1993 have been awarded to suppliers on these framework agreements.

The information requested on the total amount spent on each consultancy is considered commercial in confidence.

The total amount spent on each contract in the last five years is also considered commercial in confidence. However, the total amount spent on consultancy and the number of contracts awarded in the last five years is in the table.

Year	*Number of contracts*	*Total cost (£ million)*
1990–91	952	83.2
1991–92	933	69.7
1992–93	129	[1]36.4
1993–94	235	34.0
1994–95	197	26.1

[1] Figures for 1992–93 onwards refer solely to expenditure on consultancy services following work undertaken for the Efficiency Scrutiny into the Government's Use of External Consultants. Figures for earlier years include the cost of contracted services.

Retirement Pensions

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the proportions of men and women who will retire with a full entitlement to a basic retirement pension in *(a)* 2025 and *(b)* 2035. [6528]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is not available in the format requested. By 2025, the large majority of men and approximately two thirds of women will have entitlements to a full basic pension.

Mr. Eric Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost in 1996–97 of paying a basic pension supplement to all pensioner units whose total pension income from all sources is less than the level of income support plus £5 for a single pensioner and £8 for a couple, raising their pension incomes to the income support level plus £5 for single pensioners and £8 for pensioner couples; and what would be the annual cost of maintaining pensioners' pension incomes at that level in real terms for each year until 2001–02, assuming the 1996–97 income support regime and giving costs net of any effects on tax/benefit revenues. [6703]

Mr. Mitchell: The estimated cost in 1996–97 of raising the total pension income from all sources of all pensioner units to income support levels plus £5 for a single pensioner and £8 for a pensioner couple is £3.05 billion. It is not possible to give estimates of this cost to the year 2001–02 as reliable forecasts of future levels of pensioners' incomes are not available for this period.

Notes:

1. It has been assumed that the pensioner supplement would be paid as an increase in income support levels. Maintaining the current income-related benefit system involves aligning the thresholds and income for assessment purposes in the other income-related benefits. As a result, there are increased costs in the housing benefit and council tax benefit included in the total.

2. To raise pension-only income to the levels specified implies that other income would be disregarded. The costs reflect this assumption also.

3. No account has been taken of any additional costs that would arise from the abolition of the existing capital limits in the income-related benefits which would be necessary to ensure that those above these limits also received any required increase in pension income.

4. Income support is not taxable for claimants over 60 years of age so there are no net tax effects from the increased payment in income support.

5. The costs have been estimated using data drawn from the May 1994 income support quarterly statistical inquiry and the 1991, 1992 and 1993 family expenditure surveys, uprated to 1996–97 prices and benefit levels and rounded to £50 million.

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost in 1996–97 of paying a basic pension supplement to all pensioner units whose total pension income from all sources is less than *(a)* £69.20 and *(b)* £73.80 for a single pensioner and (i) £107.10 and (ii) £112.25 for pensioner couples, raising their pension incomes to those levels; and what would be the annual cost of maintaining pensioners' pension incomes at those levels in real terms for each year until 2001–02, assuming the 1996–97 income support regime and giving costs net of any effects on tax/benefit revenues. [6707]

Mr. Mitchell: The available information is in the table.

It is not possible to give estimates of this cost to the year 2001–02 as reliable forecasts of future levels of pensioners' incomes are not available for this period.

Estimated costs of raising pensioner incomes to specified minimums

Specified pensioner income level	*Estimate cost in 1996–97 £ billion*
(a) Single pensioners at minimum of £69.20	0.8
(b) Single pensioners at minimum of £73.80	1.3
(i) Couple pensioners at minimum of £107.10	1.1
(ii) Couple pensioners at minimum of £112.25	1.5

1. It has been assumed that the pensioner supplement would be paid as an increase in income support levels. Maintaining the current income-related benefit system involves aligning the thresholds and income for assessment purposes in the other income-related benefits. As a result, there are increased costs in the housing benefit and council tax benefit included in the total.

2. To raise pension-only income to the levels specified implies that other income would be disregarded. The costs reflect this assumption also.

3. No account has been taken of any additional costs that would arise from the abolition of the existing capital limits in the income-related benefits which would be necessary to ensure that those above these limits also received any required increase in pension income.

4. As income support is not taxable for claimants over 60 years of age, there will be no net tax effects from the increased payments in income support.

5. The costs have been estimated using data drawn from the May 1994 income support quarterly statistical inquiry and the 1991, 1992 and 1993 family expenditure surveys, uprated to 1996–97 prices and benefit levels and rounded to £50 million.

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost in 1996–97 of paying a basic pension supplement to all pensioner units whose total pension income from all sources is less than £67.05 for a single pensioner or £104.10 for pensioner couples, raising their pension incomes to those levels; and what would be the annual cost of maintaining pensioners' pension incomes at those levels in real terms for each year until 2001–02, assuming the 1996–97 income support regime and giving costs net of any effects on tax/benefits revenues. [6708]

Mr. Mitchell: The estimated cost in 1996–97 of raising the total pension income from all sources of all pensioner units to £67.05 for a single pensioner or £104.10 for pensioner couples is £1.9 billion. It is not possible to give estimates of this cost to the year 2001–02 as reliable forecasts of future levels of pensioners' incomes are not available for this period.

Notes:

1. It has been assumed that the pensioner supplement would be paid as an increase in income support levels. Maintaining the current income-related benefit system involves aligning the thresholds and income for assessment purposes in the other income-related benefits. As a result, there are increased cost in the housing benefit and council tax benefit included in the total.

2. To raise pension only income to the levels specified implies that other income would be disregarded. The costs reflect this assumption also.

3. No account has been taken of any additional costs that would arise from the abolition of the existing capital limits in the income-related benefits which would be necessary to ensure that those above these limits also received any required increase in pension income.

4. As income support is not taxable for claimants over 60 years of age, there will be no net tax effects from the increased payments in income support.

5. The costs have been estimated using data drawn from the May 1994 income support quarterly statistical inquiry and the 1991, 1992 and 1993 family expenditure surveys, uprated to 1996–97 prices and benefits levels and rounded to £50 million.

Mr. Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost in 1996–97 of raising the incomes of all pensioner units to at least the level of income support plus £5 for a single pensioner and £8 for pensioner couples; and what would be the annual cost of maintaining pensioners incomes at that level in real terms for each year until 2001–02, assuming payments were made through the income support system and assuming the most recent levels of non-take-ups. [6702]

Mr. Mitchell: The estimated cost in 1996–97 of raising the incomes of all pensioner units to at least the level of income support plus £5 for a single pensioner and £8 for pensioner couples is £800 million assuming the most recent levels of non-take-up. It is not possible to give estimates of this cost to the year 2001–02 as reliable forecasts of future levels of pensioners' incomes are not available for this period.

Notes:

1. It has been assumed that the pensioner supplement would be paid as an increase in income support levels. Maintaining the current income-related benefit system involves aligning the thresholds and income brought to account in the other income-related benefits. As a result, there are increased costs in the housing benefit and council tax benefit included in the total.

2. It has been assumed that the income of pensioners is the current income for assessment purposes in income support.

3. No account has been taken of any additional costs that would arise from the abolition of the existing capital limits in the income-related benefits which would be necessary to ensure that those above these limits also received any required increase in pension income.

4. The costs have been; estimated using data drawn from the May 1994 income support quarterly statistical inquiry and the 1991, 1992 and 1993 family expenditure surveys, uprated to 1996–97 prices and benefits levels and rounded to £50 million.

Mr. Benton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost in 1996–97 of raising the incomes of all pensioner units to at least the level of income support; and what would be the annual cost of maintaining pensioners' incomes at that level in real terms for each year until 2001–02, assuming the 1996–97 income support regime and the most recent levels of non-take-up. [6705]

Mr. Mitchell: Those pensioner units whose incomes are below income support levels are raised to that level if they take up income support. All other pensioner units are either ineligible for income support, by virtue of their incomes, or choose not to take it up. As a result, there are no costs in any year of raising the incomes of all pensioner units to at least income support levels assuming the most recent levels of non-take-up.

Notes:

1. It has been assumed that the income of pensioners is the current income for assessment purposes in income support.

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to increase the basic rate of retirement pensions. [8083]

Mr. Mitchell: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has announced his intention to increase the state pension by 3.9 per cent. in April 1996.

Benefits (Deceased Claimants)

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what are the procedures for notifying his Department's agencies of the death of a claimant with particular reference to the Pensions Agency; [6267]

(2) what safeguards exist to ensure Department of Social Security agencies do not continue to pay benefits or pensions after a claimant has died, when the payments are made to a bank account. [6266]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: When a death is registered with the registrar, the informant will be given a form BD8 along with the original death certificate. This is a free certificate to be used as a verified notification of death to the Department of Social Security.

This form asks several questions about the deceased and if benefit was in payment. It also asks the person completing it to send it in to the local social security office. The BD8 has recently been re-designed and now asks for it to be sent into the Department regardless of whether or not benefit was in payment to the deceased.

The registrars pass details of the deaths reported to them to the Office of Population Censuses and Survey. The details are then transferred to a tape which is sent to the Contributions Agency. The details from this tape are then passed to the departmental central index which then broadcasts the dates of death to every benefit computer

system. The broadcast automatically suspends payment of benefit, regardless of the method used to pay the customer.

The notes in the retirement pension order books and the leaflet BR2215 which is given to claimants who receive their RP by automated credit transfer, contain a section on what to do if the claimant has died. The advice is simply to advise the agency of the details of death and return the order book where appropriate.

Benefits Uprating

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update the information given in his answer of 27 October 1994, *Official Report*, columns *797–800*, by substituting 1996–97 values for current values in columns 4 and 5 of the table, omitting items (i) and (q) and adding the lone-parent premium, one-parent benefit and the £50 earnings limit for invalid care allowance. [6435]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People on 18 December, *Official Report*, columns *887–90*.

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the expenditure of his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title for each year since 1990–91; and what estimate he has made for 1995–96 based on expenditure to date and existing plans. [6566]

Mr. Burt: The information could be obtained only at disproportionate costs.

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the level of combined employer and employee contributions necessary to achieve balance in the national insurance fund in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1996–97, (iii) 2025 and (iv) 2035, based on the assumptions contained in "Equality in State Pension Age", Cm 2420. [6531]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The available information is in the table.

Estimated level of combined employer and employee contributions necessary to achieve balance in the National Insurance Fund

Year	*Contribution level (main rates)*[1]
1995–96[1]	19.55 per cent.
1996–97[1]	19.25 per cent.
2025[2]	16.9 per cent.
2035[2]	16.7 per cent.

Notes:

1. Based on the estimates underlying the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1996–97".

2. Based on the National Insurance Fund long-term financial estimates (Report by the Government Actuary on the third Quinquennial Review under section 137 of the Social Security Act 1975 (HC160—31 January 1995).

3. Estimated level (excluding employee and employer National Health Service allocations of 1.05 per cent. and 0.9 per cent. respectively) for there to be no Treasury Grant and for the minimum level of the fund to be maintained at the recommended one sixth of annual benefit expenditure.

Source: Government Actuary's Department.

Research Studies (Sunderland)

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list all DSS-funded pilots, trials and research studies which have been conducted since 1989 in *(a)* the city of Sunderland, *(b)* Wearside district and *(c)* Sunderland travel-to-work area identifying (i) title, summary and duration of the pilot/trial, (ii) target population and total number of participants and (iii) whether each pilot, trial or research finding was published and the date of publication; and if he will list all other non-DSS research bodies or organisations involved in each pilot, trial or research scheme. [6324]

Mr. Roger Evans: There are no details available of any pilots, trials or research having taken place in prior to 1992 in the geographical areas specified.

1992–95: Wearside District

	Pilot trial
Title	Annual Local Customer Survey
Duration	Several weeks
Target population	All district customers
Participants	10 per cent. of total customer base
Publication	Yes—results held locally (no results held for 1992 survey)
Non-DSS involvement	None

1994: Sunderland North and Houghton-le-Spring (part of Wearside) Sunderland travel to work area (Durham and Tyneside)

	Pilot trial
Title	Benefit Review of Income Support (IS) and Unemployment Benefit (UB)
Duration	5 April 1994 to 8 May 1994 (Durham) 26 September 1994 to 25 November 1994 (Tyneside and Wearside)
Target population	All Benefits Agency (BA) customers in these areas
Participants	20 (Durham)—Pilot 280 (Tyneside and Wearside)
Publication	Main exercise 10 July 1995
Non-DSS involvement	Department of Employment

Similar research for trials and full reviews of other benefits is likely to involve some BA customers in the relevant geographical areas.

1995 City of Sunderland and Wearside

	Pilot trial
Title	Trial into Revised Standards of Identity during Encashment of Instruments of Payment (IOPs)
Duration	March–June 1995
Target population	All BA customers in these areas

1995 City of Sunderland and Wearside

	Pilot trial
Participants	Actual numbers not known. Would include all BA customers who presented an IOP for encashment at a Post Office during the period of the trial
Publication	Not for external publication. Information for internal use only.
Non-DSS involvement	Post Office Counters Ltd.

In addition, the Sunderland travel-to-work area has been selected as one of the eight areas chosen to pilot earnings top-up. The pilot will start in October 1996 and last for three years. Proposals for earnings top-up—an in-work benefit for people without dependent children—were published on 5 July 1995 in the Green Paper "Piloting change in Social Security—helping people into work". The draft rules of the scheme, including the postcodes of the pilot areas, were laid before Parliament on 6 November 1995 and debated in the House of Commons on 25 November.

Social Fund

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of applicants to the social fund for community grants or crisis loans are refused. [6935]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Information on the number of awards and refusals from the discretionary social fund for 1994–95 is contained in the latest Secretary of State's annual report on the social fund, a copy of which is in the Library.

Community care grants may be awarded in a wide range of defined circumstances. These include assisting people who are leaving residential or institutional care to re-establish themselves in the community; helping people stay in the community rather than enter care; easing exceptional pressure on families; helping with certain travelling costs; and assisting people who are caring for prisoners who are released on temporary licence. The majority of refusals were because the applicant did not satisfy the basic eligibility criteria. However, 54 per cent. of those refused a community care grant in the current year were awarded a repayable budgeting loan.

The information requested for the year to date (April to November) is in the table:

Year: April–November 1995	*Applications received (thousands)*	*Refusals (thousands)*	*Refusals as a percentage of applications*
Community care grants	853	655	77
Crisis loans	749	160	21

1. The number of refusals overturned on review are not included.
2. Percentages obtained from rounded figures.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the social fund in helping people on benefit or low incomes to meet intermittent or unexpected expenses. [6936]

Mr. Mitchell: The Government believe that the social fund continues to work effectively, ensuring that available resources are targeted on those most in need of help with important expenses which are difficult to budget for. The discretionary fund provides particularly good value for money by recycling loan recoveries to help more people. Not every eligible person can expect to get a payment for every need they apply for, but the budgetary framework of the discretionary fund ensures that awards are made to help people with the highest priority needs. Social fund officers consider the individual circumstances of each application to the discretionary fund. Applicants who are dissatisfied with the decision in their case have the opportunity to seek a review. We will continue to keep the operation of the fund under close scrutiny, particularly in so far as it affects the help we are able to provide to some of our most vulnerable citizens.

Disability Working Allowance

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his letter to the hon. Member for Taunton of 13 December, POS(2)3446/179, what representations alleging that the introduction of disabled working allowance discriminates against self-employed people he has received; and if he will make a statement. [7172]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: There have been no representations. Self-employed people constituted 20 per cent. of the disability working allowance case load at 31 July 1995.

Source:
ASD Disability Working Allowance Quarterly Statistical tables.

War Pensions

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what illnesses or diseases the War Pensions Agency recognises as being caused by being exposed to mustard gas in the service volunteers programme at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down. [7295]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The war pension scheme does not involve the recognition or prescription of specific illnesses or diseases.

A war pension may be awarded for any disablement which is attributable to or aggravated by service in the armed forces, including voluntary participating in any test programme at Porton Down.

Housing Benefit (Sick and Disabled People)

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the impact of the proposed changes to housing benefit for private tenants on sick and disabled people who have an extra bedroom to accommodate an occasional overnight carer. [7562]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: No such assessment has been made. However, local authorities will have discretion to pay housing benefit above the level of the maximum rent in cases which they judge to involve exceptional hardship.

Internet

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary for Social Security what web site his Department maintains on the

Internet; what information is provided there; how often it is updated; what is the address; and if he or his Department answer questions and supplies additional information through the Internet. [7574]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The Department of Social Security currently maintains web sites for all its main agencies as part of the Government's centre for information systems' Government information service—address: HTTP://www.open.gov.uk. General background information on the Department's work and details of the Department's press releases are regularly updated. Internet is not currently being used to provide further information or answer queries from individuals. The Contributions Agency is conducting an evaluation project on the potential of Internet for communicating with its customers.

Pensions

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in employment are not currently members of *(a)* the state earnings-related pension scheme, *(b)* company pension schemes and *(c)* personal pension schemes; and what assessment he has made of the causes of this lack of provision. [7590]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available. Employees who accrue no SERPS entitlement and are not members of company or personal pension schemes will be earning below the annual lower earnings limit for national insurance contributions. As employers are not required to provide details of such employees, no records are held centrally.

Pensioners' Benefits

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the number and proportion of pensioners in each region of the United Kingdom who receive *(a)* income support, *(b)* housing benefit and *(c)* council tax benefit. [7645]

Mr. Heald: The available information is in the tables.

Income Support Pensioner Recipients by the Government Standard Statistical Regions

May 1994

GSS region	*Number of cases in receipt of Income Support (thousands)*	*As a percentage of the pensioner population*
South East (excluding London)	227	12.3
London (Inner and Outer)	204	—
North	98	14.8
Yorkshire and Humberside	153	14.7
East Midlands	103	12.2
East Anglia	53	11.4
South-West	114	10
West Midlands	169	15.7
North-West	211	16.1
England	1,577	15.7
Wales	87	13.4
Scotland	158	15.3
Northern Ireland	—	—

Housing Benefit Pensioner Recipients by the Government Standard Statistical Regions

May 1994

GSS region	*Number of cases in receipt of Housing Benefit (thousands)*	*As a percentage of the pensioner population*
South East (excluding London)	256	15.4
London (Inner and Outer)	283	—
North	136	20.6
Yorkshire and Humberside	205	19.7
East Midlands	120	14.2
East Anglia	66	14.2
South-West	127	11.2
West Midlands	189	17.5
North-West	227	17.3
England	1,609	16
Wales	90	13.8
Scotland	245	23.7
Northern Ireland	42	15.1

Council Tax Benefit Recipients by the Government Standard Statistical Regions

May 1994

GSS region	*Number of cases in receipt of Council Tax Benefit (thousands)*	*As a percentage of the pensioner population*
South East (excluding London)	299	20.9
London (Inner and Outer)	433	—
North	187	28.3
Yorkshire and Humberside	297	28.5
East Midlands	192	22.7
East Anglia	102	22.0
South-West	213	18.8
West Midlands	305	28.3
North-West	362	27.5
England	2,390	23.8
Wales	135	20.7
Scotland	304	29.4
Northern Ireland	—	—

Notes for all Tables:

1. London and the South-East regions have been added together for the population estimate.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand and percentages to one decimal place.
3. 1994 Income Support figures are not yet available for Northern Ireland.
4. Council Tax Benefit does not apply in Northern Ireland.
5. Figures for HB/CTB are for benefit units which may be a single person or a couple.
6. Pensioners are defined as either a claimant or partner aged 60 or over except for figures for Northern Ireland where claimant or partner are aged 65 or over.

Sources:

Income Support Statistics Annual/Quarterly Enquiries May 1994.
Office of Population Censuses and Surveys mid year estimate 1993.
Housing Benefit Management Information Systems Annual 1 per cent. sample.

Benefits Agency Medical Services

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the main components of the training programmes which must be taken by all Benefits Agency medical services doctors carrying out the all-work test medical assessments. [6259]

Mr. Burt: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Ron Davies, dated 20 December 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the main components of the training programmes which must be taken by all Benefits Agency Medical Services (BAMS) doctors carrying out the all-work test medical assessments.

All Doctors undergo a four day modular training course which can be tailored to meet individual needs. Elements of the course include the technical aspects of Incapacity Benefits, the requirements for the content of the medical report form, selecting and justifying the choice of descriptors which specify the level of a customer's disability in each functional area, and mental health problems. The course also has, and I attach great importance to this, elements on customer service and equal opportunities.

All Doctors are required to pass a multiple choice test at the end of the course, the validity of which has been verified with the help of the University of Central Midlands. The Doctors must also successfully complete a supervised examination session. The first three reports they complete alone are also monitored by a more senior Doctor to ensure continuing high quality.

In addition to this, all full-time BAMS Doctors have to undergo a two day residential course covering the clinical areas they are likely to encounter such as back pain and psychiatric disorders and those which are likely to cause particular difficulties, such as chronic fatigue states. Many of the sessions in these courses are conducted by internationally recognised experts in their fields. The Benefits Agency Doctors are then responsible for cascading this information to the part-time fee paid Doctors who are also involved in this work.

I hope you find this helpful.

Access to Work Scheme

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the levels of benefit savings stemming from the introduction of the access to work scheme; and if he will make a statement on the expected effect on these savings of changes to the access to work scheme between 18 December 1995 and April 1996. [8154]

Mr. Paice: I have been asked to reply.

Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under it chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Tom Clarke, dated 9 January 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about benefit savings stemming from the Access to Work programme.

We do not calculate the social security benefit savings accruing from disabled people making use of the Access to Work programme in order to take up work. Help is given based on ability to work rather than on entitlement to a benefit so the pattern of benefit savings, if any, will be dependent on the circumstances of the individual case. For example, people in employment continue to receive any in-work benefits they were entitled to as well as Access to Work help.

For any labour market programme, simply setting the cost of the programme against possible gross savings in social security payments, is not an accurate indicator of net costs. Access to Work would present still further difficulties in any such calculation because it supports people when they are in employment, as well as those seeking work.

For estimates of the net cost to the Exchequer of any labour market programme, the cost of the programme has to be set against potential savings. This would require various assumptions about what unemployed people would earn in work, and how their gaining employment might affect employment and output elsewhere. Providing support in instances where it would have been provided anyway, or where it reduces opportunities for other people in the labour market, reduces net savings.

For Access to Work even more sweeping assumptions would be necessary. The same problems would arise as for any labour market programme. In addition because Access to Work pays directly for the extra costs of disabled people who are in work, it would be necessary to make further assumptions about the likelihood and duration of these people continuing in work, in the absence of support from Access to Work.

For these reasons, we do not believe that calculations of net benefit savings flowing from support under Access to Work would be especially useful, either for the period before 18 December or afterwards.

I hope this clarifies the position.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many mobile telephones have been supplied to his Department in each of the last eight years; and in each of those years how many different suppliers were involved. [8030]

Mr. Burt: The available information is in the table. Information for earlier years is not available in the form requested and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Financial year	*Number of mobile 'phones*	*Number of suppliers*
1994–95	2,146	9
1995–96 up to end November	867	7

Carers

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what benefit home carers who ceased work to care for elderly relatives are entitled to when their caring duties end; and if he will make a statement. [8095]

Mr. Burt: Ex-carers may be entitled to a wide range of social security benefits, depending on their individual circumstances.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many carers lost their right to unemployment benefit following the 1988 legislation on social benefits. [7994]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available.

Occupational Pensions (Fraud)

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he will take to combat fraud in occupational pensions. [8205]

Mr. Heald: The measures in the Pensions Act 1995, which received Royal Assent in July, reflect the Government's commitment to safeguarding the security of occupational pension scheme assets.

Parental Incomes

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what estimate he has made of *(a)* the gross and *(b)* the net income of (i) a lone parent with one child under 11 in local authority accommodation and (ii) a lone parent with one child under 11 in owner occupation, each after one year on benefit, who are (1) without any paid work, (2) in part-time paid work and (3) in full-time paid work earning *(A)* £80, *(B)* £90, *(C)* £100, *(D)* £110, *(E)* £120, *(F)* £130, *(G)* £140, *(H)* £150, *(I)* £160, *(J)* £170, *(K)* £180, *(L)* £190 and *(M)* £200 per week; [8178]

(2) what estimate he has made of *(a)* the gross and *(b)* the net income of (i) a couple with two children under 11 in local authority accommodation and (ii) a couple with two children under 11 in owner occupation, each after one year on benefit, who are (1) without any paid work, (2) a woman in part-time paid work, (3) a man in full-time paid work, (4) a man in full-time paid work and a woman in part-time work and (5) both the man and woman in full-time work earning *(A)* £80, *(B)* £90, *(C)* £100, *(D)* £110, *(E)* £120, *(F)* £130, *(G)* £140, *(H)* £150, *(I)* £160, *(J)* £170, *(K)* £180, *(L)* £190, *(M)* £200, *(N)* £210, *(O)* £220, *(P)* £230, *(Q)* £240 and *(R)* £250 per week. [8179]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the tables.

It should be noted that a number of assumptions have had to be made regarding income, housing costs, hours of work and earnings. These are listed at the foot of the tables.

Lone parent with one child in Local Authority Accommodation

Gross weekly earnings £	*Part time or Full time work* £	*a. Net income before housing costs* £	*b. Net income after housing costs* £
0	n/a	126.19	82.04
80	Part	159.48	115.33
	Full	169.48	125.33
90	Part	160.43	116.28
	Full	170.43	126.28
100	Part	161.22	117.07
	Full	171.22	127.07
110	Part	161.95	117.80
	Full	171.95	127.80
120	Part	162.69	118.54
	Full	172.69	128.54
130	Part	163.42	119.27
	Full	173.42	129.27
140	Part	164.10	119.95
	Full	174.10	129.95
150	Part	164.78	120.63
	Full	174.78	130.63
160	Part	165.47	121.32
	Full	175.47	131.32
170	Part	166.34	122.19
	Full	76.34	132.19
180	Part	168.29	124.14
	Full	178.29	134.14
190	Part	169.83	125.68
	Full	180.24	136.09
200	Part	176.33	132.18
	Full	182.19	138.04

Lone parent with one child in Owner Occupied Accommodation

Gross weekly earnings £	*Part time or Full time work*	*a. Net income before housing costs* £	*b. Net income after housing costs* £
0	n/a	135.68	82.04
80	Part	147.29	93.65
	Full	157.29	103.65
90	Part	149.99	96.35
	Full	159.99	106.35
100	Part	152.25	98.61
	Full	162.25	108.61
110	Part	154.35	100.71
	Full	164.35	110.71
120	Part	156.45	102.81
	Full	166.45	112.81
130	Part	158.54	104.90
	Full	168.54	114.90
140	Part	160.49	106.85
	Full	170.49	116.85
150	Part	162.44	108.80
	Full	172.44	118.80
160	Part	164.39	110.75
	Full	174.39	120.75
170	Part	166.34	112.70
	Full	176.34	122.70
180	Part	168.29	114.65
	Full	178.29	124.65
190	Part	169.83	116.19
	Full	180.24	126.60
200	Part	176.33	122.69
	Full	182.19	128.55

Couple with two children in Local Authority Accommodation

Gross weekly earnings £	*Part time or Full time work*	*a. Net income before housing costs* £	*b. Net income after housing costs* £
-0	n/a	174.08	123.43
80	1 Part time	181.15	130.50
	1 Full time	191.15	140.50
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	191.31	140.66
	Both Full time	191.31	140.66
90	1 Part time	181.56	130.91
	1 Full time	191.56	140.91
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	191.76	141.11
	Both Full time	191.76	141.11
100	1 Part time	181.90	131.25
	1 Full time	191.90	141.25
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	192.21	141.56
	Both Full time	192.21	141.56

Couple with two children in Local Authority Accommodation

Gross weekly earnings £	*Part time or Full time work*	*a. Net income before housing costs* £	*b. Net income after housing costs* £
110	1 Part time	182.21	131.56
	1 Full time	192.21	141.56
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	192.59	141.94
	Both Full time	192.66	142.01
120	1 Part time	182.53	131.88
	1 Full time	192.53	141.88
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	193.00	142.35
	Both Full time	192.98	142.33
130	1 Part time	182.84	132.19
	1 Full time	192.84	142.19
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	193.40	142.75
	Both Full time	193.39	142.74
140	1 Part time	183.13	132.48
	1 Full time	193.13	142.48
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	193.81	143.16
	Both Full time	193.79	143.14
150	1 Part time	183.43	132.78
	1 Full time	193.43	142.78
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	194.15	143.50
	Both Full time	194.20	143.55
160	1 Part time	183.72	133.07
	1 Full time	193.72	143.07
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	194.61	143.96
	Both Full time	194.94	144.29
170	1 Part time	184.01	133.36
	1 Full time	194.01	143.36
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	195.00	144.35
	Both Full time	195.96	145.31
180	1 Part time	184.30	133.65
	1 Full time	194.30	143.65
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	197.09	146.44
	Both Full time	198.06	147.41
190	1 Part time	184.92	134.27
	1 Full time	194.92	144.27
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	199.04	148.39
	Both Full time	200.16	149.51
200	1 Part time	185	135.09
	1 Full time	195.74	145.09
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	200.99	150.34
	Both Full time	202.26	151.61
210	1 Part time	187.69	137.04
	1 Full time	197.69	147.04
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	202.48	151.83
	Both Full time	207.21	156.56
220	1 Part time	191.48	140.83
	1 Full time	199.64	148.99
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	208.98	158.33
	Both Full time	214.21	163.56

Couple with two children in Local Authority Accommodation

Gross weekly earnings £	*Part time or Full time work*	*a. Net income before housing costs* £	*b. Net income after housing costs* £
230	1 Part time	197.98	147.33
	1 Full time	201.59	150.94
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	215.48	164.83
	Both Full time	221.21	170.56
240	1 Part time	204.48	153.83
	1 Full time	204.48	153.83
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	221.98	171.33
	Both Full time	228.21	177.56
250	1 Part time	210.98	160.33
	1 Full time	210.98	160.33
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	228.48	177.83
	Both Full time	235.21	184.56

Couple with two children in Owner Occupied Accommodation

Gross weekly earnings £	*Part time or Full time*	*a. Net income before housing costs* £	*b. Net income after housing costs* £
0	n/a	185.32	123.43
80	1 Part time	165.10	103.21
	1 Full time	175.10	113.21
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	175.91	114.02
	Both Full time	175.91	114.02
90	1 Part time	167.26	105.37
	1 Full time	177.26	115.37
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	178.31	116.42
	Both Full time	178.31	116.42
100	1 Part time	169.07	107.18
	1 Full time	179.07	117.18
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	180.71	118.82
	Both Full time	180.71	118.82
110	1 Part time	170.75	108.86
	1 Full time	180.75	108.86
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	182.78	120.89
	Both Full time	183.11	121.22
120	1 Part time	172.43	110.54
	1 Full time	182.43	120.54
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	184.94	123.05
	Both Full time	184.86	122.97
130	1 Part time	174.10	112.21
	1 Full time	184.10	122.21
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	187.10	125.21
	Both Full time	187.02	125.13
140	1 Part time	175.66	113.77
	1 Full time	185.66	123.77
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	189.26	127.37
	Both Full time	189.18	127.29

Couple with two children in Owner Occupied Accommodation

Gross weekly earnings £	*Part time or Full time*	*a. Net income before housing costs* £	*b. Net income after housing costs* £
150	1 Part time	177.22	115.33
	1 Full time	187.22	125.33
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	191.07	129.18
	Both Full time	191.34	129.45
160	1 Part time	178.78	116.89
	1 Full time	188.78	126.89
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	192.90	131.01
	Both Full time	193.83	131.94
170	1 Part time	180.34	118.45
	1 Full time	190.34	128.45
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	195.00	133.11
	Both Full time	195.96	134.07
180	1 Part time	181.90	120.01
	1 Full time	191.80	130.01
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	197.09	135.20
	Both Full time	198.06	136.17
190	1 Part time	183.79	121.90
	1 Full time	193.79	131.90
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	199.04	137.15
	Both Full time	200.16	138.27
200	1 Part time	185.74	123.85
	1 Full time	195.74	133.85
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	200.99	139.10
	Both Full time	202.26	140.37
210	1 Part time	187.69	125.80
	1 Full time	197.69	135.80
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	202.48	140.59
	Both Full time	207.21	145.32
220	1 Part time	191.48	129.59
	1 Full time	199.64	137.75
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	208.98	147.09
	Both Full time	214.21	152.32
230	1 Part time	197.98	136.09
	1 Full time	201.59	139.70
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	215.48	153.59
	Both Full time	221.21	159.32
240	1 Part time	204.48	142.59
	1 Full time	204.48	142.59
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	221.98	160.09
	Both Full time	228.21	166.32
250	1 Part time	210.98	149.09
	1 Full time	210.98	149.09
	1 Part time, 1 Full time	228.48	166.59
	Both Full time	235.21	173.32

1. Gross income is assumed to mean income, including benefit income, after tax and National Insurance but before payment of housing costs.

2. Net income is assumed to mean income after tax and National Insurance and payment of housing costs.

3. Families in local authority accommodation are assumed to be liable for average council tax and local authority rent appropriate to the family size.

4. Families in owner-occupied accommodation are assumed to be liable for average mortgage interest, based on families receiving Income Support, and average council tax appropriate to the family size.

5. Families without any paid work are assumed to have no income other than Income Support, Housing Benefit (where appropriate), Council Tax Benefit, Child Benefit and, for the lone parent examples, One Parent Benefit.

6. Examples for families in part-time paid work assume earnings are for 16-29 hours per week.

7. Examples for families in full-time paid work assume that earnings are for 30 or more hours per week.

8. Examples for couples where both partners are in full-time work assume that total gross household earnings are at the levels specified in the question and that earnings and married couple's tax allowance are apportioned equally between both partners. Examples where one partner works full-time and one part-time assume that part-time earnings are £50 per week and that the full-time earner receives the married couple's tax allowance. This assumption means that where total gross household earnings are £80 or £90, part-time earnings will exceed full-time earnings. Different allocations of earnings may result in different gross and net incomes.

9. All examples assume that childcare costs are nil and that the families shown take-up full entitlement to relevant income-related benefits.

State Earnings-related Pension Scheme

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the cost and practicality of enabling SERPS rights to be split at the point of divorce; and if he will make a statement. [8159]

Mr. Heald: No detailed assessment has been made on the costs of splitting SERPS pension rights. Costs would depend on the specific requirements for splitting. There are also a number of difficulties which would have to be overcome before splitting of SERPS could be considered feasible, but it is clear that it would complicate administration. The Pensions Management Institute, in its report "Pensions and Divorce", acknowledged that there are real problems involved in the splitting of SERPS.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Missing Persons Helpline

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will provide public funding for the national missing persons helpline: [5994]

(2) what representations he has received for public funding in respect of the national missing persons helpline; [5993]

(3) which sources of public funds the national missing persons helpline can appeal to in the event of financial difficulties. [5999]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on 18 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *958*.

Prison Deaths

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of deaths in prisons *(a)* involving restraint by prison officers, *(b)* in solitary confinement under body belt restraint and *(c)* involving other restricting methods, in each of the last five years. [7025]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 9 January 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about deaths in prisons in each of the last five years.

The information, from 1 January 1990 to 15 December 1995, is given in the attached table. One of the deaths occurred while the prisoner was in the segregation unit in a body belt. In the other five instances the prisoners became ill or died while subject to control and restraint techniques.

Year	*Numbers of deaths while being restrained*
1990	0
1991	2
1992	0
1993	0
1994	1
1995	3

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to what extent criteria used to determine whether asylum seekers are refugees recognise that refugees may attempt to gain entry to the United Kingdom otherwise than by claiming asylum. [7722]

Miss Widdecombe: All asylum claims are considered on their merits, but under paragraph 341 of the immigration rules failure to apply for asylum forthwith on arrival may damage an applicant's credibility unless the claim is based on events which have taken place since his arrival.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current weekly cost to the Home Office of detentions of people seeking asylum in the United Kingdom; and what estimate he has made of the changes in the costs of the implementation of the Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendments Order as published in draft form. [7633]

Miss Widdecombe: Records relating to the costs of detention under immigration powers do not distinguish between people who have sought asylum and others.

The current weekly cost of detaining a person within the Immigration Service detention estate is estimated at £540 per week. This figure includes the cost of administrative support from Immigration Service headquarters. Some asylum seekers are detained in Prison Service remand centres or local prisons, where the average cost per place in 1994–95 was £449 per week. The latter figure excludes headquarters costs.

The proposals contained in the draft Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendments Order would have no effect on the costs of detention under immigration powers.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make it his policy to allow detained asylum seekers or their representatives to have written reasons for their detention upon request, in the form of *(a)* a photocopy of the bail summary or *(b)* in another form; and if he will estimate the cost of adopting such a policy; [7398]

(2) if he will make a statement on the procedure for periodic reviews of detention of asylum seekers; what criteria are used in determining whether detention should continue; what written records are made of these reviews; and what steps he will take to ensure that written reasons are available to the asylum seeker and his representatives where the review determines that the detention should continue; [7399]

(3) what written records are annually made in respect of the reasons for the detention of individual asylum seekers; [7396]

(4) what criteria are used in Scotland to determine whether to detain asylum seekers. [7412]

Miss Widdecombe: Detention under immigration powers is authorised initially by an officer of at least the rank of chief immigration officer and is reviewed within 24 hours by an Immigration Service inspector. Thereafter, detention is reviewed locally at least every seven days. After one month the case is reviewed at Immigration Service headquarters monthly and at an increasingly senior level.

Detained asylum applicants are already notified of the reasons for their detention. This is done orally, in a language which they understand. This provides the detainee with an opportunity to clarify anything which he does not understand. The detainee or his representative may seek further clarification of the reasons for detention at any time from the relevant immigration office.

Each time detention is reviewed, all aspects of the case are considered, including any change in circumstances. The reasons for maintaining detention are recorded on the individual's file and a notification is sent monthly to the detainee, advising him of the progress on his case.

It is not possible to estimate the cost of providing written reasons for detention as a matter of routine in all cases, but such a system would be cumbersome, time consuming and a poor use of resources. Bail summaries are already provided to the appellate authorities when a bail application is made.

Criteria for the exercise of powers of detention and the procedures for notifying detainees of the reasons for their detention are the same for Scotland as in other parts of the United Kingdom.

I do not believe that changes to the present procedures are required.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of asylum seekers whose claims have been refused by him in the last year have subsequently appealed to the special adjudicator. [7402]

Mr. Kirkhope: In the 12-month period from December 1994 to November 1995 there were 20,520 initial decisions to refuse asylum. During the same period, 14,080 appeals against the refusal of asylum were lodged with the Home Office.

Some of these appeals will have been lodged against decisions made prior to December 1994 and some of those applicants who were refused may have exercised more than one right of appeal. For these reasons, an accurate appeal rate is not readily available.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers in the last two years who claimed asylum after they had entered the United Kingdom claimed within *(a)* one week, *(b)* one month and *(c)* two months of entry; and if he will express each figure as a proportion of (i) the number of asylum seekers who claimed after entry into the United during that period and (ii) the number that did so, and did not rely in whole or in part on events which had taken place after they had left their country of origin. [7404]

Mr. Kirkhope: Information regarding the length of time between arrival date and application date, for those who applied for asylum in the United Kingdom after having been previously granted leave to enter or remain under another section of the immigration rules, is given in the table. Information on the number of applications which were based on events that occurred subsequent to their arrival is not recorded centrally.

Average time taken[1] to apply for asylum by persons[2] previously granted leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom under another section of the Immigration Rules, December 1993 to November 1995

Period of time between arrival and application	*Percentage*
Within 1 week	15
1 to 4 weeks	15
1 to 2 months	10
Over 2 months	60
Total	100

[1] Estimated and rounded to the nearest 5 per cent.

[2] Excludes those in-country cases for which arrival dates are not known.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what steps he has taken to ensure that the detention of asylum seekers under paragraph 16(2) of schedule 2 the Immigration Act 1971 in respect of whom he has not yet made a decision on their claim, complies with article 5(4) of the European convention on human rights; [7406]

(2) if it is his policy to detain asylum seekers on the basis that *(a)* they are judged to have a weak case for asylum and *(b)* they initially applied to enter as a visitor. [7723]

Miss Widdecombe: I am satisfied that detention under the Immigration Act 1971 of people who have sought asylum but whose applications have not been determined, does not breach the United Kingdom's obligations under this article. However, powers of detention are used only where there is not alternative.

Instructions to Immigration Service staff make clear that special consideration to release from detention should always be given to asylum applicants who have brought themselves to their attention at the first reasonable opportunity. In all cases, temporary admission/release is granted whenever possible, the overriding consideration being whether the person is likely to comply voluntarily with restrictions imposed. In making this assessment, account is taken of all relevant factors, including the likelihood of the person being removed from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average period between claim and decision for asylum seekers claiming during the last five years. [7401]

Mr. Kirkhope: During 1994, the average time taken to reach an initial decision on applications submitted after the implementation of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 was 5.9 months and 25.6 months for those submitted before the 1993 Act. In the first 11 months of 1995, the average decision times were 8.7 months for post-1993 Act cases and 37.8 months for pre-1993 Act cases.

For the six month period between January and June 1993, prior to the implementation of the 1993 Act, the average time taken to make an initial decision was approximately 19 months.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers are currently still awaiting a decision on their claim having claimed more than a year ago. [7403]

Mr. Kirkhope: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) on 4 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *20*, which gave the number of asylum applications awaiting an initial decision as at 31 October 1995, by year of application.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to inform asylum seekers and organisations which represent their interests of the criteria which he uses in determining whether to detain asylum seekers. [7405]

Miss Widdecombe: Extracts from Immigration Service instructions to staff including criteria for detention have been provided to Amnesty International, the Medical Foundation and the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of asylum seekers in the London borough of Lewisham at the latest date for which information is available. [7636]

Mr. Kirkhope: Information on the places of residence of people currently seeking asylum is not held centrally.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what considerations led to the policy of allowing presenting officers to decide as to whether to allow the representatives of asylum seekers sight of the bail summary; what criteria they use in exercising their

discretion; if he will instruct presenting officers to allow the representatives of asylum seekers sight of the bail summary in all cases except when to do so would prejudice national security; and if he will estimate the cost of this procedure. [7397]

Miss Widdecombe: To improve the efficient and effective operation of the immigration appeals system we propose in future to supply both the adjudicator and applicant with a bail summary when the Home Office proposes to oppose an application for bail under the Immigration Act 1971. The summary will outline the reasons why the Home Office opposes bail. The operation of the system will be reviewed in six months. This information is already provided to presenting officers by immigration officers and it is not expected to lead to any substantial expenditure.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide details of *(a)* the number of applications by refugees seeking asylum, *(b)* the number of refugees accepted and *(c)* the number of refusals in each of the past five years for Bulgaria, Cyprus, India, Ghana, Pakistan, Poland and Romania (i) individually and (ii) collectively. [7056]

Miss Widdecombe: Information for the years 1992 to 1994 on asylum applications from nationals of the requested countries, with the exception of Cyprus, and on decisions made, is given in tables 4.1 to 4.3 of Home Office statistical bulletin, "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 1994", issue 15/95. Tables 4.1 to 4.2 of issue 19/93 of this publication show equivalent information for all the requested nationalities for 1990 and 1991. Copies of both issues of this bulletin are available in the Library.

Information on asylum applications from nationals of Cyprus for the years 1992 to 1994 is given in the table.

Applications[1] received for asylum in the United Kingdom from nationals of Cyprus, excluding dependants, and decisions[2,3] made, 1992 to 1994

	1992	1993	1994
Total applications	95	135	300
Total decisions	10	40	160
Of which:			
Granted asylum	[1]—	[1]—	—
Refused asylum but granted exceptional leave	5	20	—
Total refused asylum	5	20	160

[1] Provisional and estimated figures rounded to the nearest 5= 1 or 2.
[2] Information is of initial decisions, excluding the outcome of appeals or other subsequent decisions.
[3] Decision figures do not necessarily relate to applications submitted in the same year.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people who had previously sought asylum and then married in the United Kingdom have been refused leave to stay under the primary purposes rule for each of the last five years. [8174]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of those seeking asylum at port of entry were granted temporary admission without being fingerprinted in each of the last five years. [8171]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum applications are withdrawn every month; and what happened to the applicants after withdrawal in each of the last five years. [8172]

Mr. Kirkhope: During the first 11 months of 1995, the average number of withdrawn asylum applications was 220 per month.

It is not always known why asylum applications are withdrawn. It may be as a result of the applicant's being granted leave under another section of the Immigration Rules or because they decide to leave the United Kingdom. A statistical breakdown of such cases is not available.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of those seeking asylum at overseas posts in each of the last five years have been granted temporary admission without a pro forma interview being completed. [8173]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is not available.

Prison Population

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the percentage change in the prison population for each year since 1979; what estimate his department has made of the change in the prison population over the next five years; and if he will make a statement. [7390]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Alan Beith, dated 9 January 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking what was the percentage change in the prison population for each year since 1979 and what estimate has been made of the change in the prison population over the next five years.

The percentage changes in the prison population are shown in the attached table.

The most recent short-term projection of the prison population gives a projection for 1996 of 52,900. The most recent long term projections are given in the Home Office Statistical Bulletin Issue 4/95 "Projections of Long Term Trends in the Prison Population to 2002", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. The next annual update of these projections will be published in the Spring.

Percentage change in the prison population[1] on the previous year

Year	Percentage change
1979	+ 1.0
1980	+ 2.1
1981	+ 0.8
1982	+ 0.7
1983	0.0
1984	- 1.0
1985	+ 6.8
1986	+ 1.3

Percentage change in the prison population[1] on the previous year

Year	Percentage change
1987	+ 4.4
1988	+ 2.0
1989	- 2.7
1990	- 6.1
1991	+ 0.6
1992	- 0.2
1993	- 2.7
1994	+ 9.5

[1] Population includes persons held in police cells.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total female prison population, by category and in total, on 1 January of each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [7409]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A.J. Pearson to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 9 January 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking what was the total female prison population, by category and in total, on 1 January of each of the last 10 years.

Historical prison population statistics are available for the last day of each month. Details of the female prison population by type of prisoner are therefore given in the attached table for 31 December for the years 1985 to 1994.

Female prison population[1] by type of prisoner, 31 December[2] each year

	Prisoners on remand			Sentenced prisoners				
Year	Untried	Convicted unsentenced	All remanded	Adults	Young offenders	All sentenced	Non-criminals	Total
1985	300	45	345	906	223	1,129	2	1,476
1986	366	54	420	985	221	1,206	4	1,630
1987	400	67	467	1,046	176	1,222	7	1,696
1988	370	73	443	1,085	183	1,268	4	1,215
1989	336	70	406	1,087	144	1,231	*0	1,637
1990	267	83	350	966	136	1,102	3	1,455
1991	284	62	346	992	154	1,146	7	1,499
1992	213	86	299	939	115	1,054	0	1,353
1993	295	93	388	1,013	134	1,147	38	1,573
1994	330	126	456	1,120	172	1,292	24	1,772

Notes:
[1] Population includes 57 prisoners held in police cells in December 1986 who are assumed to be untried prisoners.
[2] Prison population at the end of the year is decreased by seasonal factors.
Source:
Prison Statistics England and Wales for years 1985 to 1993.

Abnormal Loads

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many abnormal loads involving railway locomotives and rolling stock have been notified to police authorities for escort on roads since the introduction of rail charges by Railtrack; and how many such loads were notified during the equivalent period before that date. [7736]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Knives

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he intends to take to control the sale of knives. [7650]

Mr. Maclean: The sale of a variety of knives and other weapons which include bladed or pointed components is prohibited under the Restriction of Offensive Weapons Act 1959 and section 141 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988. My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to restrict the sale of knives in general. He will consider adding to the list of prohibited items any bladed item which has no legitimate use and which includes some feature which enables it to be defined in law in such a way as to distinguish it from knives which have legitimate uses.

Firearms Certificates

Mr. Coe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of firearm and shotgun certificates at present in force in Falmouth and Camborne. [7375]

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the Devon and Cornwall police that the number of firearms and shotgun certificates at present in force in the Falmouth and Camborne area is as follows:

Firearm certificates: 404

Shotgun certificates: 1,427.

Ex-prisoners' Accommodation

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the residential institutions for ex-prisoners which his Department *(a)* funds in full and *(b)* funds in part; and if he will make a statement; [7336]

(2) what was the total expenditure on residential institutions for ex-prisoners for each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [7337]

Mr. Sackville: Probation committees are now responsible for grants to the voluntary and private sectors to support the provision of accommodation for offenders.

including released prisoners, with the exception of the Langley House Trust which continues for the time being to receive a grant directly from the Home Office. Total grants have been as follows:

1992–92: £7.4 million

1992–93: £8.4 million

1993–94: £9.8 million

1994–95: £10.1 million

1995–96: £10.0 million.

In addition, approved probation hostels, while catering primarily for bailees and offenders serving community sentences, are also available to released prisoners who are subject to probation service supervision. Home Office current expenditure on approved hostels has been:

1991–92: £18.2 million

1992–93: £24.3 million

1993–94: £26.2 million

1994–95: £23.3 million

1995–96: £24.3 million.

Custody Costs

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average cost per week of custody for each category of prisoner for each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [7368]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 9 January 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the average weekly cost of custody for each category of prisoner.

We do not collect information on the cost of prisoners according to their category but by type of establishment. More than one category of prisoner may be held in the same establishment. The attached table gives the average weekly net operating cost per inmate per type of establishment for the last five years.

Net operating cost per prisoner per week in cash terms (£)

Type of establishment	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*[1]1993–94*	*[1]1994–95*
Local prisons and remand centres	388	437	526	441	448
Contracted out establishments	—	—	539	385	409
Dispersal prisons	616	807	816	659	678
Category B training prisons	368	438	518	404	416
Category C training prisons	297	363	387	336	351
Adult male open prisons	293	316	331	269	282
Young offender closed establishments	390	452	492	415	416
Young offender open establishments	550	551	634	473	456
Young offender remand establishments	—	—	—	420	450
Female establishments	563	629	657	540	512

[1] The figures for 1993–94 and 1994–95 are on a different basis from those for earlier years which include notional inter-establishment charges for goods and services and other non-cash costs (e.g. opportunity cost of rent and depreciation).

Drugs Offences

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for *(a)* each court circuit area in England and Wales, *(b)* England and *(c)* Wales the number of convictions secured in cases involving drugs for each of the last three available years; and if he will make a statement. [6666]

Mr. Maclean: Information for 1992 to 1994 (latest available) is given in the table.

Number of offenders convicted of indictable drug offences at the Crown court by area 1992–94

Area	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Crown court circuit			
Midland and Oxford	777	872	954
North Eastern	778	894	903
Northern	1,126	1,091	1,051
South Eastern	3,007	2,488	2,790
Wales and Chester	406	462	488
Western	513	513	629
England	6,346	6,011	6,493
Wales	261	309	322
England and Wales	6,607	6,320	6,815

Fire Service

Ms Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the criteria for risk categories for firefighting; and if he will make a statement. [6923]

Mr. Sackville: The criteria for risk categories are an integral part of the nationally recommended minimum standards of fire cover. In response to a recommendation in the Audit Commission report. "In the line of Fire", these standards are being reviewed by the Central Brigades Advisory Council.

Ms Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimated cost of rebuilding Downham fire station. [6920]

Mr. Sackville: Responsibility for the provision of fire services, including the cost of rebuilding fire stations, is a matter for the fire authority concerned—in this case, the London fire and civil defence authority.

Marchioness Disaster

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the expected approximate length, in words and A4 pages, of the complete transcript of the re-opened inquest into the victims of the Marchioness disaster held in April 1995; and what plans

he has for making it available to the relatives of the deceased and to other interested parties. [7121]

Mr. Sackville: I understand that the transcript is about 3,000 pages and approximately 900,000 words in length. The supply of such a document is entirely a matter for the coroner, in accordance with the Coroners Rules 1984.

Visa Applications

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for *(a)* single entry and *(b)* multiple entry visit visas were (i) received, (ii) granted and (iii) refused at each post in the Indian sub-continent, Ghana, Nigeria, the Philippines and Jamaica in each quarter of 1994 and the first quarters of 1995; and what was the delay between application and interview for those whose applications were felt to need a second or long interview at each of the above posts in (1) June 1994, (2) January 1995 and (3) June 1995 or the nearest available date. [7687]

Mr. Kirkhope: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as the information becomes available.

Breeding of Dogs Acts

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been pursued for offences against the Breeding of Dogs Acts in the last 10 years; and what assessment he has made as to the efforts of local authorities to ensure that this measure is put into effect. [6730]

Mr. Maclean: The information is given in the table.

The appropriate use of the powers contained in the Act is a matter for each local authority to determine according to local priorities.

Number of defendants prosecuted at magistrates courts under the Breeding of Dogs Acts

England and Wales

	1984	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Breeding of Dogs Act 1973 Prosecutions	1	1	5	7	1	3	11	11	23	5	2
Breeding of Dogs Act 1991[1] Prosecutions	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]	[3]	[3]	[3]	[3]

[1] Came into force on 25 September 1991.
[2] Not applicable.
[3] Not available.

Departmental Running Costs

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the cost of running his departmental office, and that of his predecessor, for each year since 1990–91 including the current year, broken down into *(a)* telephone bills, *(b)* total staff costs, *(c)* press and communications, *(d)* entertainment, *(e)* alcoholic drinks, *(f)* non-alcoholic drinks, *(g)* stationery, *(h)* office refurbishment and *(i)* other. [6399]

Mr. Howard: The estimated cost of running my departmental office for the current year and for the previous two years are as follows:

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Total staff costs	1,326,343	1,612,746	1,771,631
Press and communications	11,083,793	14,140,920	10,958,900
Running costs	485,343	510,988	875,669

These figures exclude the cost of telephone bills which is not available as a specific cost to my departmental office.

The information on office refurbishment was given in reply to a question from the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on 18 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *968*.

Expenditure on the other items in each of the last three years is not collected in the format requested but is included in the running cost expenditure which is shown in the table.

Figures for 1990–91, 1991–92 and 1992–93 can be made available only at disproportionate cost.

Prison Boards of Visitors

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the names, occupations and qualifications of members of the boards of visitors for HMP Lindholme and HMP Moorlands; [2233]

(2) if he will list the occupations, qualifications and source of nomination of the members of the board of visitors of *(a)* Doncaster prison *(b)* Moorlands prison *(c)* Lindholme prison and *(d)* Hatfield prison. [1819]

Miss Widdecombe: Members of boards of visitors at each prison and young offender institution in England and Wales are appointed by my right hon. and learned Friend. Occupation is not a criterion for appointment and information about members' occupations is not held centrally and could be gathered only at disproportionate cost. There are no requirements for specific formal qualifications.

Nominations for boards of visitors come from a variety of sources. Many candidates put themselves forward as a result of seeing advertised vacancies in newspapers and other outlets or are referred from a variety of other voluntary organisations. The only criteria for applying are that the candidate should live within about 20 miles of the prison or young offender institution to which they wish to be appointed, must not have an interest in any contract for the supply of goods or services to that establishment or other close link which would affect their impartiality, and have the time, interest and commitment to undertake

the duties of a board member. Applications to join boards of visitors are welcome from anyone who fits these criteria.

Deportation Orders

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* decisions have been made to deport, *(b)* deportation orders signed and *(c)* deportation orders enforced against (i) British overseas citizens and (ii) other British nationals who are not British citizens in each year since 1990; to which countries it has been proposed to send these people; and how many such people against whom decisions to deport were made left the country voluntarily. [7685]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information available is given in the table. Statistics are not available on the countries to which British nationals have been removed from the United Kingdom under the deportation process. Of the 27 British nationals removed in 1994, 26 were British dependent territories citizens or British nationals (overseas) from Hong Kong, and one was a BDTC from St. Helena.

British nationals subject to deportation action

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	[1]1995
British overseas citizens						
Notices of intention to deport issued, and court recommendations for deportation made	—	—	6	341		
Deportation orders made	—	—	—	—	1	2
Deportation orders enforced	—	—	—	—	—	—
Supervised departures	—	—	2	—	—	—
Voluntary departures	—	—	—	—	1	—
Other British nationals[2]						
Notices of intention to deport issued, and court recommendations for deportation made	67	71	105	72	77	37
Deportation orders made	9	11	13	4	22	11
Deportation orders enforced	4	5	9	9	11	2
Supervised departures	31	41	57	30	16	11
Voluntary departures	2	1	4	2	9	4

[1] January to June—provisional figures.
[2] British Dependent Territories Citizens, British Nationals (Overseas), British Subjects and British Protected Persons.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many decisions to make a deportation order, by nationality of the potential deportee, where there is a right of appeal as provided under *(a)* section 5 of the Immigration Act 1988 or *(b)* section 8(3) of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 have been made in each quarter since 1 July 1993; and on what basis these decisions have been made. [7602]

Mr. Kirkhope: Information on notices of intention to deport issued up to the third quarter of 1995 is given in table A. An analysis by nationality of the person, in respect of notices issued in the whole of 1994, is given in table B; the quarterly data requested for he whole of the period from July 1993 onwards could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Table A: Notices of intention to deport issued since 1 July 1993

Category of case	1993		1994					1995[1]		
	3rd quarter	4th quarter	1st quarter	2nd quarter	3rd quarter	4th quarter	Year	1st quarter	2nd quarter	3rd quarter
Breach of conditions of leave to enter or remain[2]	987	954	1,173	1,285	1,445	1,383	5,286	1,343	1,187	1,412
Conducive to the public good[3]	24	15	27	46	26	26	125	19	31	16
Dependants[4]	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	43	58
Total	1,011	970	1,200	1,331	1,471	1,409	5,411	1,362	1,261	1,486

[1] Provisional data.
[2] Under section 3(5)(a) of Immigration Act 1971.
[3] Under section 3(5)(b).
[4] Under section 3(5)(c).

Table B: Notices of intention to deport issued, by nationality, 1994.

Geographical region and nationality	Number of persons
European Economic Area	
Austria	—
Belgium	3
Denmark	—
Finland	—
France	3
Germany	5
Greece	1
Iceland	—
Ireland	1
Italy	8
Luxembourg	—
Netherlands	15
Norway	—
Portugal	7
Spain	3
Sweden	1
Total EEA	47
Europe	
Bulgaria	26
Cyprus	33
Former Czechoslovakia	10
Hungary	3
Malta	1
Poland	199
Romania	33
Russia	16
Other former USSR	21
Switzerland	—

Table B: Notices of intention to deport issued, by nationality, 1994.

Geographical region and nationality	*Number of persons*
Turkey	130
Former Yugoslavia	51
Other Europe	—
Total Europe	523
Americas	
Argentina	–
Barbados	8
Brazil	53
Canada	6
Chile	2
Colombia	47
Guyana	31
Jamaica	225
Mexico	1
Peru	8
Trinidad and Tobago	25
USA	39
Venezuela	–
Other Americas	49
Total Americas	494
Africa	
Algeria	127
Angola	1
Egypt	38
Ethiopia	25
Ghana	529
Kenya	52
Libya	10
Mauritius	42
Morocco	106
Nigeria	1,038
Sierra Leone	176
Somalia	–
South Africa	41
Sudan	23
Tanzania	24
Tunisia	11
Uganda	47
Zaire	2
Zambia	26
Zimbabwe	49
Other Africa	107
Total Africa	2,474
Asia	
Indian sub-continent	
Bangladesh	124
India	536
Pakistan	617
Total Indian sub-continent	1,277
Middle East	
Iran	29
Iraq	6
Israel	14
Jordan	8
Kuwait	–
Lebanon	6
Saudi Arabia	—
Syria	9
Yemen	9
Other Middle East	6
Total Middle East	87
Remainder of Asia	
China	30

Table B: Notices of intention to deport issued, by nationality, 1994.

Geographical region and nationality	*Number of persons*
Hong Kong[1]	69
Indonesia	—
Japan	18
Malaysia	97
Phillippines	116
Singapore	4
South Korea	13
Sri Lanka	49
Taiwan	1
Thailand	22
Other Asia	23
Total Remainder of Asia	442
Oceania	
Australia	25
New Zealand	26
Other Oceania	3
Total Oceania	54
British Overseas citizens	7
Stateless[2]	6
All nationalities	5,411

[1] Includes Hong Kong stateless persons.
[2] Excluding Palestine and Hong Kong stateless persons.

Illegal Immigrants

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many operations against people alleged to be in the United Kingdom illegally involving both immigration officers and police took place during 1994 and 1995 to the latest convenient date; for each operation by date and by name how many *(a)* immigration officers and *(b)* police officers were involved; how many people were arrested and found to be (i) legally in the United Kingdom, (ii) in breach of immigration conditions, (iii) alleged illegal entrants and (iv) British citizens; how many requested and were granted legal advice before interview; and how many were detained for (1) one day or less, (2) between a day and a week and (3) over a week; and how many subsequently left the United Kingdom. [7427]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been prosecuted for facilitating the entry of illegal immigrants in each year since 1985. [8025]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information is given in the table.

Number of persons prosecuted for the offence of "knowingly facilitating the entry of an illegal entrant"[1,2] 1985–1994

England and Wales

Year	*Prosecutions*
1985	21
1986	25
1987	41
1988	41

Number of persons prosecuted for the offence of "knowingly facilitating the entry of an illegal entrant"[1] [2] 1985–1994

England and Wales

Year	*Prosecutions*
1989	28
1990	46
1991	73
1992	63
1993	33
1994	124

[1] Offence under Section 25(1) of the Immigration Act 1971.

[2] Principal immigration offence.

British Citizenship Applications

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for registration as British citizens of children born in the United Kingdom on or after 1 January 1983 have been *(a)* received, *(b)* granted and *(c)* refused since 1 January 1993. [7660]

Mr. Kirkhope: A total of 4,817 children born in the United Kingdom on or after 1 January 1983 have been registered as British citizens since 1 January 1993. The number of such applications received and refused is not available.

Special Quota Vouchers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were waiting for special quota vouchers in *(a)* India, *(b)* east Africa and *(c)* the rest of the world in (i) June 1994, (ii) December 1994 and (iii) June 1995; when those issued with vouchers on those dates had applied; how many vouchers were issued in *(a)* India, *(b)* east Africa and *(c)* the rest of the world in (1) 1994 and (2) the first half of 1995; when those applying can now expect to receive vouchers; and how many applicants there were for vouchers in *(a)* India *(b)* east Africa and *(c)* the rest of the world in (1) 1994 and (2) the first half of 1995. [7421]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information which is currently available is given in the tables.

Persons applying for a special voucher for entry to the United Kingdom, 1994 and Q1–Q2 1995

Persons

	Applications newly received[1]			*Vouchers issued*			*Applications awaiting a decision at the end of*		
	1994	*Q1 1995*	*Q2 1995*	*1994*	*Q1 1995*	*Q2 1995*	*Q2 1994*	*Q4 1994*	*Q2 1995*
India	210	100	60	170	50	50	60	60	90
Kenya	150	40	50	150	30	20	90	90	120
Tanzania	10	[2]—	[2]—	10	[2]—	[3]—	60	60	40
Malawi	[2]—	[3]—	[3]—	[2]—	[3]—	[2]—	[3]—	[2]—	[2]—
Zambia	[2]—	[3]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[3]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Rest of the world	10	[3]—	[2]—	10	[2]—	[2]—	[3]—	[2]—	[2]—
Total	400	140	120	350	80	80	210	210	250

[1] Includes applications subsequently withdrawn or lapsed.

[2] Five or fewer.

[3] Nil.

Waiting times for persons applying for a special voucher, Q2-Q4 1994 and Q2 1995

Months

	Waiting times to main interview for persons at end of		*Persons applying at end of*
	Q2 1994	*Q4 1994*	*Q2 1995*
India	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Kenya	0.1	0.5	1
Tanzania	1.5	1.5	1.5
Malawi	0.25	0.25	0.25
Zambia	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Rest of the world	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—

[1] Nil.

Immigration (Temporary Admission)

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the *(a)* passengers in total and *(b)* persons treated as illegal entrants who were granted temporary admission or release in 1994 and 1995 to the latest date for which information is available subsequently absconded; how many of these were (1) asylum seekers and (2) applying for leave on some other basis; and how many (i) later reported voluntarily to the immigration authorities and (ii) were rearrested. [7422]

Mr. Kirkhope: The available information relates to the number of persons who absconded, either from detention or by failing to respond to the terms of temporary admission or release, and is given in the table. The other information requested is not available.

Absconders

Category of person	*1994*	*1995*[1]
Passengers[2]	1,240	1,374
Illegal entrants:		
Asylum seekers	260	132
Others	224	89
Total	484	221

[1] January to September.

[2] A breakdown between asylum seekers and other passengers is not available.

Immigration Applications

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many outstanding immigration applications there are at Lunar house from *(a)* students, *(b)* family members in the United Kingdom applying for variation of stay, *(c)* settlement entry clearance applications referred from overseas posts and *(d)* asylum seekers; and

what are the average times applicants in each category must wait before a decision. [7425]

Mr. Kirkhope: The available information is that at the end of November 1995 there were in total about 68,500 asylum applications and some 20,500 other cases in the general immigration caseworking groups, including referred entry clearance applications, the majority of which were under consideration or the subject of further inquiries. The estimated average length of time between the receipt of an application and the decision for cases decided in the general caseworking groups in the third quarter of 1995, was about eight weeks for students and about 12 weeks for all non-asylum applications. Information on average waiting times for family members in the United Kingdom for variation of leave and settlement entry clearance applications referred from overseas posts is not available.

For the average waiting times for asylum applications, I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 22 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *219*.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men, *(b)* women and *(c)* children were waiting in each queue at each post in the Indian subcontinent on (i) 1 January 1995, (ii) 30 June 1995 and (iii) the latest convenient date. [7420]

Mr. Kirkhope: Information on waiting times to first interview for applicants in the settlement queues at posts in the Indian sub-continent is contained in table 2.5 of the Home Office Statistical Bulletin issue 21/95 "Control of Immigration: Statistics UK First Half 1995" published on 19 October 1995, a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for entry clearance from *(a)* wives, *(b)* husbands, *(c)* fiancés and *(d)* fiancées made at British posts in (i) New Delhi, (ii) Bombay, (iii) Calcutta, (iv) Madras, (v) Dhaka, (vi) Islamabad, (vii) Karachi, (viii) Colombo, (ix) Accra, (x) Lagos, (xi) Manila, (xii) Bangkok, (xiii) Washington and (xiv) Ottawa for each quarter since January 1994, and in total, were (1) received, (2) granted and (3) refused; how many refusals at each post were (A) wholly and (B) partly because the visa officer was not satisfied that the primary purpose of the marriage was not immigration; how many refusals at each post were *(x)* wholly and *(y)* partly because the visa officer was not satisfied that the couple could support and accommodate themselves without recourse to public funds; and what was the refusal rate at each post and what percentage of those refusals were (X) wholly and (Y) partly on primary purpose grounds. [7686]

Mr. Kirkhope: Information for the Indian subcontinent for each quarter of 1994 and the first two quarters of 1995 is given in the tables. Where numbers are small, figures for individual posts have been combined. Information on reasons for refusals is not compiled for periods shorter than 12 months. Corresponding information for Colombo, Accra, Lagos, Manila, Bangkok, Washington and Ottawa is not available centrally.

Table 1: Spouses and fiance(e)s in the Indian sub-continent applying for entry clearance for settlement in the United Kingdom, 1994 and first two quarters 1995

Number of persons and percentage

	1994					1995	
	Q1	*Q2*	*Q3*	*Q4*	*Year*	*Q1*	*Q2*
HUSBANDS							
New Delhi (including Calcutta)							
Applications received[1]	90	80	50	50	280	80	70
Applications granted[2]	60	40	40	40	180	60	50
Applications refused initially	50	40	40	40	160	40	30
Refusal rate (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	45	n/a	n/a
Bombay (including Madras)							
Applications received[1]	100	40	70	60	310	90	80
Applications granted[2]	70	70	60	70	260	70	60
Applications refused initially	50	30	50	50	180	40	20
Refusal (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	33	n/a	n/a
Dhaka							
Applications received[1]	270	300	370	470	1,400	300	320
Applications granted[2]	230	180	220	210	840	220	170
Applications refused initially	130	50	160	120	460	200	260
Refusal rate (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	33	n/a	n/a
Islamabad (including Karachi)							
Applications received[1]	750	670	670	630	2,720	790	760
Applications granted[2]	440	420	420	440	1,720	420	480
Applications refused initially	430	440	430	400	1,690	530	460
Refusal rate (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	42	n/a	n/a
WIVES							
New Delhi (including Calcutta)							
Applications received[1]	320	260	200	170	940	320	280
Applications granted[2]	220	190	210	130	760	190	210
Applications refused initially	60	70	60	60	260	80	60
Refusal rate (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	23	n/a	n/a

Table 1: Spouses and fiance(e)s in the Indian sub-continent applying for entry clearance for settlement in the United Kingdom, 1994 and first two quarters 1995

Number of persons and percentage

	1994					1995	
	Q1	*Q2*	*Q3*	*Q4*	*Year*	*Q1*	*Q2*
Bombay (including Madras)							
Applications received[1]	330	260	220	210	1,020	300	340
Applications granted[2]	240	210	280	210	950	220	150
Applications refused initially	50	40	40	30	160	50	30
Refusal rate (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	12	n/a	n/a
Dhaka							
Applications received[1]	330	330	390	370	1,420	310	410
Applications granted[2]	300	280	320	280	1,180	220	240
Applications refused initially	40	20	60	60	190	80	100
Refusal rate (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	13	n/a	n/a
Islamabad (including Karachi)							
Applications received[1]	910	790	770	740	3,210	980	840
Applications granted[2]	600	600	540	550	2,290	580	710
Applications refused initially	160	180	180	180	710	240	210
Refusal rate (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	19	n/a	n/a
Male fiancés							
New Delhi (including Calcutta)							
Applications received[1]	30	20	10	10	70	20	20
Applications granted[2]	10	10	10	10	40	10	10
Applications refused initially	40	10	20	20	80	[4]—	[4]—
Refusal rate (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	66	n/a	n/a
Bombay (including Madras)							
Applications received[1]	40	20	10	20	80	20	30
Applications granted[2]	20	10	20	10	50	10	10
Applications refused initially	20	10	20	20	70	10	20
Refusal (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	45	n/a	n/a
Dhaka							
Applications received[1]	10	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	10	[4]—	[4]—
Applications granted[2]	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	—	[4]—	—	—
Applications refused initially	[4]—	—	[4]—	—	[4]—	—	[4]—
Refusal rate (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	50	n/a	n/a
Islamabad (including Karachi)							
Applications received[1]	30	30	30	30	120	20	20
Applications granted[2]	20	10	10	10	40	10	10
Applications refused initially	20	30	20	10	80	20	20
Refusal rate (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	62	n/a	n/a
Female fiancées							
New Delhi (including Calcutta)							
Applications received[1]	40	30	40	30	140	40	40
Applications granted[2]	30	10	10	30	80	10	10
Applications refused initially	20	10	10	10	60	20	[4]—
Refusal rate (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	41	n/a	n/a
Bombay (including Madras)							
Applications received[1]	40	20	20	20	110	30	40
Applications granted[2]	20	20	30	30	100	10	10
Applications refused initially	10	10	10	[4]—	30	10	[4]—
Refusal rate (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	20	n/a	n/a
Dhaka							
Applications received[1]	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	10	20	[4]—	—
Applications granted[2]	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	10	[4]—	[4]—
Applications refused initially	[4]—	—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Refusal rate (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	27	n/a	n/a
Isamabad (including Karachi)							
Applications received[1]	30	40	20	40	140	40	20
Applications granted[2]	20	30	30	30	110	30	20
Applications refused initially	20	10	20	10	60	10	10
Refusal rate (percentage)[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	32	n/a	n/a

[1] Including applications subsequently withdrawn or lapsed.

[2] Granted initially or on appeal.

[3] Applications refused initially, minus applications granted on appeal, as a percentage of applications decided.

[4] Five or fewer.

— = nil.

n/a = not applicable.

Table 2: Spouses and fiancé(e)s in the Indian sub-continent refused entry clearance for settlement in the United Kingdom, quarterly 1994 and first half 1995

Number of persons

	Number refused because couple could not accommodate/maintain themselves without recourse to public funds											
	Quarter 1, 1994		*Quarter 2, 1994*		*Quarter 3, 1994*		*Quarter 4, 1994*		*Quarter 1, 1995*		*Quarter 2, 1995*	
	Solely for these reasons	*Partly for these reasons*	*Solely for these reasons*	*Partly for these reasons*	*Solely for these reasons*	*Partly for these reasons*	*Solely for these reasons*	*Partly for these reasons*	*Solely for these reasons*	*Partly for these reasons*	*Solely for these reasons*	*Partly for these reasons*
New Delhi (including Calcutta)												
Husbands	—	10	2	6	1	7	2	8	3	8	4	3
Wives	1	13	—	16	4	12	2	16	3	21	1	2
Male fiancés	—	4	—	1	—	3	1	4	—	—	—	—
Female fiancées	—	2	—	4	—	—	3	2	2	3	—	—
Bombay (including Madras)												
Husbands	—	6	—	3	1	12	—	14	—	7	1	—
Wives	2	4	5	5	6	8	8	3	6	8	4	2
Male fiancés	—	—	—	2	—	2	—	2	—	2	—	1
Female fiancées	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	1	—	4	—	—
Dhaka												
Husbands	48	22	24	2	77	21	59	21	109	48	172	53
Wives	32	2	8	4	37	—	48	5	62	3	76	1
Male fiancés	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Female fiancées	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	1	1	—
Islamabad (including Karachi)												
Husbands	74	187	71	245	99	196	103	187	123	234	112	207
Wives	94	25	94	24	101	34	106	29	137	30	103	53
Male fiancés	5	9	3	17	5	11	2	6	2	4	2	8
Female fiancées	3	3	4	3	6	3	8	1	3	—	1	5
Total Indian sub-continent												
Husbands	122	225	97	256	178	236	164	230	235	297	289	263
Wives	129	44	107	49	148	54	164	53	208	62	184	58
Male fiancés	6	13	3	20	5	16	3	12	2	6	3	9
Female fiancées	3	5	4	7	6	5	13	4	5	8	2	5

Table 3: Spouses and fiancé(e)s in the Indian sub-continent refused entry clearance for settlement in the United Kingdom, quarterly 1994 and first half 1995

Number of persons

	Number refused because primary purpose of marriage was to obtain admission to the United Kingdom											
	Quarter 1, 1994		*Quarter 2, 1994*		*Quarter 3, 1994*		*Quarter 4, 1994*		*Quarter 1, 1995*		*Quarter 2, 1995*	
	Solely for these reasons	*Partly for these reasons*	*Solely for these reasons*	*Partly for these reasons*	*Solely for these reasons*	*Partly for these reasons*	*Solely for these reasons*	*Partly for these reasons*	*Solely for these reasons*	*Partly for these reasons*	*Solely for these reasons*	*Partly for these reasons*
New Delhi (including Calcutta)												
Husbands	27	10	24	6	25	7	22	8	22	8	5	3
Wives	40	13	46	16	41	13	31	16	42	21	20	2
Male fiancés	23	4	5	1	11	4	10	5	5	—	—	1
Female fiancées	15	3	6	4	7	2	9	3	12	3	—	—
Bombay (including Madras)												
Husbands	28	6	15	3	21	12	21	14	13	7	7	—
Wives	22	4	19	5	17	8	14	3	13	8	9	2
Male fiancés	4	—	6	2	12	2	4	2	2	2	5	1
Female fiancées	1	—	4	—	5	1	2	1	1	4	1	—
Dhaka												
Husbands	43	21	18	2	47	21	37	20	34	47	29	52
Wives	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	1
Male fiancés	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Female fiancées	1	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	—
Islamabad (including Karachi)												
Husbands	131	187	105	244	106	195	84	187	127	240	87	206
Wives	7	19	12	21	11	32	11	29	15	30	18	53
Male fiancés	1	9	5	17	4	11	4	6	5	4	8	5
Female fiancées	3	3	1	3	2	3	1	1	3	—	—	4
Total Indian sub-continent												
Husbands	229	224	162	255	199	235	164	229	196	302	128	261
Wives	69	36	77	44	69	53	56	49	70	59	47	58
Male fiancés	29	13	16	20	28	17	18	13	12	6	13	7
Female fiancées	20	6	11	7	14	7	13	5	16	7	1	4

Table 4: Spouses and fiancé(e)s in the Indian sub-continent refused entry clearance for settlement in the United Kingdom, quarterly 1994 and first half 1995

Percentages

	Primary purpose refusals as a percentage of all refusals											
	Quarter 1, 1994		*Quarter 2, 1994*		*Quarter 3, 1994*		*Quarter 4, 1994*		*Quarter 1, 1995*		*Quarter 2, 1995*	
	Solely for these reasons	*Partly for these reasons*	*Solely for these reasons*	*Partly for these reasons*	*Solely for these reasons*	*Partly for these reasons*	*Solely for these reasons*	*Partly for these reasons*	*Solely for these reasons*	*Partly for these reasons*	*Solely for these reasons*	*Partly for these reasons*
New Delhi (including Calcutta)												
Husbands	56	21	65	16	64	18	63	23	59	22	19	12
Wives	63	21	64	22	63	20	56	29	55	28	36	4
Male fiancés	66	11	[1]56	[1]11	65	24	50	25	[1]100	—	—	[1]50
Female fiancées	71	14	[1]55	[1]36	[1]78	[1]22	60	20	71	18	—	—
Bombay (including Madras)												
Husbands	58	13	50	10	40	23	40	27	30	16	35	—
Wives	48	9	54	14	41	20	42	9	28	17	31	7
Male fiancés	25	—	[1]50	[1]17	55	9	20	10	[1]18	[1]18	29	6
Female fiancées	[1]14	—	[1]50	—	[1]50	[1]10	[1]40	[1]20	[1]13	[1]50	[1]25	—
Dhaka												
Husbands	32	16	38	4	29	13	31	17	17	23	11	20
Wives	—	—	—	9	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	1
Male fiancés	[1]50	—	—	—	[1]100	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Female fiancées	[1]50	—	—	—	—	[1]100	—	—	—	—	—	—
Islamabad (including Karachi)												
Husbands	30	43	24	56	25	46	21	47	24	45	19	44
Wives	4	12	7	12	6	18	6	16	6	13	9	25
Male fiancés	5	47	19	63	17	46	[1]31	[1]46	29	24	42	26
Female fiancées	20	20	[1]9	[1]27	13	19	[1]7	[1]7	[1]43	—	—	[1]44
Total Indian sub-continent												
Husbands	35	34	29	46	29	35	27	38	24	37	17	34
Wives	22	11	25	14	20	15	17	15	16	13	12	15
Male fiancés	40	18	33	42	43	23	34	25	36	18	33	18
Female fiancées	44	13	37	23	39	19	38	15	48	21	6	24

[1] Percentages based on fewer than 15 applications refused.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for leave to remain for an indefinite period on the grounds of marriage to a British or settled spouse from *(a)* men and *(b)* women were (i) granted and (ii) refused in 1994 and 1995 to the latest convenient date; of those refusals, how many were refused because the Home Office was not satisfied that (1) the couple intended to stay together permanently as husband and wife, (2) adequate maintenance was available, (3) adequate accommodation was available and (4) how many were refused for other reasons; and of those refused for reason (1), in how many cases domestic violence was alleged. [7654]

Mr. Kirkhope: The available information is given in the table. Allegations of domestic violence are not separately recorded.

Grants and refusals of applications for indefinite leave to remain on the grounds of marriage 1994 and 1995 (January–June)

	Men		*Women*	
	1994	*1995*	*1994*	*1995*
Grants	11,670	6,090	14,920	8,440
Refusals				
Intention to live together	340	240	360	220
Maintenance, accommodation, other reasons	20	10	10	10

British Overseas Citizens

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many minor children born to a British overseas citizen parent outside the United Kingdom have been *(a)* registered or *(b)* refused registration as (i) a British citizen or (ii) a British overseas citizen in each year since 1 January 1990. [7601]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information is not available in the form requested. Minor children may apply for registration as British overseas citizens under section 27 of the British Nationality Act 1981. The number of grants made under this section, most of which will have been made to minor children born abroad to a British overseas citizen parent, are as follows:

1990: 10

1991: 12

1992: 18

1993: 7

1994: 2

1995: 1.

Doncaster Prison

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to commission a study to evaluate the performance of Premier Prison Services Ltd. at Doncaster prison; and if he will make a statement. [8057]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 9 January 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the performance of Premier Prison Services Ltd at Doncaster prison.

There are no plans at present to commission a study to evaluate the performance of Premier Prison Services Ltd at Doncaster prison.

Contract compliance is monitored by the on-site Prison Service Controller, who will as part of his function draw the Director's attention to any matters that need either to be rectified or merit further review. This will be done variously in writing, at formal meetings or through regular informal liaison and, if necessary, a default notice. This is part of the daily process of monitoring compliance with the contract for running the prison.

The prison is also subject to inspections by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, whose annual report on a prison is laid before Parliament and an independent Board of Visitors. The Board of Visitors has unlimited access to the prison.

Victoria and Albert Museum

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the compliance of the trading arm of the Victoria and Albert museum with the Charities Act 1992, in respect of the disclosure of the amounts donated to charity from the mail order business; and if he will make a statement.

[7983]

Mr. Sackville: None.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 10 January 1996

ENVIRONMENT

Environmental Technology Manufacturers

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Secretary of State for the environment, pursuant to his answer of 30 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *802*, if he will take into account the potential economic benefits and costs to environmental technology manufacturers with special reference to lost business and damage to international competitiveness in the four year revision of all chief inspectors' guidance notes and process guidance notes in addition to following developments in technology and techniques for preventing or reducing pollution; and what mechanisms will be put in place to ensure that such account is taken. [7734]

Mr. Clappison: The benefits referred to in my reply of 30 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *802*, should continue to arise because of the progressive nature of part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, as reflected in the regular reviews of the guidance notes. The continued supply of information on available pollution control techniques by manufacturers will be valuable in this regard. However, the legislation does not allow for the economic benefits and costs to environmental technology manufacturers to be part of the judgment in deciding conditions to be included in authorisations of the processes regulated.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement regarding the United Kingdom's progress in achieving sustainability under agenda 21 of the UN conference on environment and development. [7715]

Mr. Clappison: We last reported on progress towards achieving sustainable development in "This Common Inheritance: UK Annual Report 1995", published in March of this year. We intend to publish the next such report in March 1996.

Water Industry (Competition)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the consultation paper on greater competition in the water industry is due to be published. [7589]

Mr. Clappison: My right hon. Friend proposes to publish a consultation paper in the near future.

Home Owners (Mortgages)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further action he intends to take to assist home owners facing repossession who are in difficulties with their mortgage payments. [7699]

Mr. Clappison: Home owners will continue to benefit from Government action to secure sustainable economic growth, increased employment opportunities, low inflation, low interest rates and low mortgage payments. This will help ensure that fewer people have difficulty meeting their mortgage payments and that those in arrears are more likely to be able to pay them off.

South Pennine Moors

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will designate the south Pennine moors as a special protection area under EC directive 79/409/EEC; and if he will make a statement. [7673]

Mr. Clappison: The south Pennine moors is now a priority site among some 24 proposals for special protection areas that are currently with the Department. Officials are considering the results of consultations with other Government Departments, and owners and occupiers. In the meantime, planning policy guidance note 9—on nature conservation—requires local planning authorities to treat potential special protection areas in the same way as classified sites.

Pennine Reservoirs

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will require North West Water and Yorkshire Water to provide assurances regarding the safety and stability of Pennine reservoirs with earth dams, following the exceptional weather conditions; and if he will make a statement. [7671]

Mr. Clappison: Water companies are responsible for the safety of all earth dams they own or operate under all weather conditions. The structural safety and stability of large raised reservoirs and dams are safeguarded through the operation of the Reservoirs Act 1975. Under the Act, water companies have to employ civil engineers who provide ongoing supervision with reports on safety at least once a year, and expert inspecting engineers who make a detailed safety assessment at least once every 10 years. Where this is judged necessary, the supervising engineer may call for a detailed safety assessment at any time.

Water Leakages

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 12 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *588*, on what grounds the water company projections of water balances for the periodic review are judged to be commercially confidential. [7556]

Mr. Clappison: Information on water balances was supplied to the Director General of Water Services by water companies as part of a package provided on a commercially confidential basis for the purposes of the periodic review. However, I understand that the director general will be asking the companies if they would be content for information included about individual leakage targets to be made public.

Homelessness

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many persons were registered as homeless in the north-west region for each year since 1992. [7700]

Mr. Clappison: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 20 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *1235*.

Tree Protection

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to introduce statutory guidelines for the protection of urban trees associated with the laying of cables. [7714]

Mr. Clappison: Voluntary guidelines, published by the National Joint Utilities Group, have been in place since April 1995. We are considering comments received from local authorities across the country as part of our review of the guidelines six months after their implementation.

National Forest

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in planting the national forest; and what steps he is taking to involve local communities in the project. [7708]

Mr. Clappison: The National Forest Company was established in April 1995 to implement the strategy for the forest. Six hundred hectares have been planted since the inception of the project in 1991. A further 224 hectares has been committed to planting through round 1 of the national forest tender scheme, introduced in 1995. The company encourages community involvement in all its work, and has established a local authority advisory group and a community projects working group to help develop community action.

Water Conservation

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to ensure that the water companies comply with the recommendations of the National Rivers Authority regarding water conservation in the event of below average winter rainfall. [7672]

Mr. Clappison: It is the responsibility of all water undertakers to manage and maintain an efficient and economical system of water supply in accordance with operating licences granted by the Director General of Water Services. The National Rivers Authority report "Measures to Safeguard Public Water Supplies" concluded that all water companies are now following strategies to conserve resources to safeguard supplies for next summer. The authority will keep the position under review and will provide further advice as necessary.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to promote water conservation; and if he will make a statement. [7930]

Mr. Clappison: The Water Industry Act 1991 places water undertakers under a duty to develop and maintain an efficient and economical system of water supply and additionally places them under a duty to promote water conservation among their customers. Water conservation is also promoted through the water byelaws and through the Government's environmental technology best practice programme. The review of lessons to be learnt from the drought, announced on 1 September, includes consideration of patterns of demand and approaches to demand management.

Water Company Assets

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the asset management plans produced by each water company at the time of privatisation. [7557]

Mr. Clappison: No. The water companies' asset management plans contain commercially confidential information.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the latest estimate of the savings in carbon dioxide emissions which the Energy Saving Trust will deliver up to 2000. [8023]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Energy Saving Trust's established programme of activities is expected to save about 0.3 million tonnes of carbon. Targets will be set as further schemes are developed. They will contribute to further savings, but these cannot yet be quantified. The trust is developing a range of pump-priming schemes. These will have an immediate impact on carbon dioxide emissions and, by encouraging changes in behaviour and in energy efficiency markets, should lead to further savings in the long term.

Temporary Accommodation (London)

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which are the 10 London boroughs with the highest number of households in temporary accommodation; and in each case what is the number of households thus placed. [7939]

Mr. Clappison: The 10 London boroughs reporting the highest numbers of households in temporary accommodation under the homelessness provisions of the Housing Act 1985 at the end of March 1995, the latest date for which figures are available for all boroughs, were as follows:

London borough—number of households in temporary accommodation

	Number
Hackney	3,707
Haringey	2,666
Newham	2,126
Brent	1,894
Lambeth	1,045
Hillingdon	1,002
Redbridge	994
Croydon	993
Enfield	932
Hammersmith and Fulham	865

Source:
Housing Investment Programme (HIP) returns.

The figures cover households which have been accepted as homeless and are awaiting accommodation, and those where inquiries into eligibility are still being carried out.

Vacant Housing

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which are the 10 local authorities (i) in England and (ii) in London with the highest number of housing voids; and in each case what is *(a)* the total stock of the authority and *(b)* the number of management voids. [7947]

Mr. Clappison: Figures for the 10 local authorities reporting the highest numbers of their own dwellings as vacant on 1 April 1995 are listed, for England and London, together with numbers of their total stock and management vacants:

	Stock	*Total vacants*	*Management vacants*
(a) England			
Liverpool	48,685	4,377	787
Hackney	39,560	3,894	1,180
Lambeth	43,068	2,176	1,114
Sheffield	71,696	2,046	1,153
Leeds	78,142	2,018	1,133
Birmingham	99,816	1,899	1,443
Manchester	83,406	1,660	1,211
Newcastle upon Tyne	39,224	1,634	1,067
Tower Hamlets	37,578	1,562	609
Islington	37,045	1,483	692
(b) London			
Hackney	39,560	3,894	1,180
Lambeth	43,068	2,176	1,114
Tower Hamlets	37,578	1,562	609
Islington	37,045	1,483	692
Southwark	54,266	1,129	418
Lewisham	35,095	1,051	498
Greenwich	32,297	795	535
Newham	25,818	735	517
Camden	29,789	543	304
Redbridge	6,761	515	248

Source:
1995 Housing Investment Programme (HIP1) returns.

Castle Cement

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment for what percentage of the coal burn at Castle Cement, Clitheroe, secondary liquid fuel is permitted to be used as a substitute. [7943]

Mr. Clappison: The company has agreed with Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution to replace no more than 50 per cent. of the thermal input from burning coal with energy from secondary liquid fuel.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Enviornment how many people have complained to Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution alleging ill effects from the burning of Cemfuel by Castle Cement at Clitheroe; and how many have been examined by a qualified toxicologist. [7949]

Mr. Clappison: In the past 21 months HMIP has received approximately 440 complaints concerning Castle Cement, some of which allege ill effects. This does not include a number of complaints passed to my Department by the local Members of Parliament. My Department is not aware of anybody being examined by a qualified toxicologist.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Enviornment what consideration he has given to suspending the burning of Cemfuel at Castle Cement at Clitheroe pending an evaluation by the Department of Health on possible health risks. [7945]

Mr. Clappison: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution has sought advice from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, East Lancashire health authority and the Department of Health, and is satisfied that there does not appear to be any evidence that the use of Cemfuel is any more harmful to health than the use of coal.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Enviornment what is the annual tonnage limit for secondary liquid fuel burned at Castle Cement, Clitheroe. [7942]

Mr. Clappison: The annual tonnage of fuel burned is limited by the design of the kilns to approximately 70,000 tonnes per year. Fifty per cent. of the thermal input can be replaced by secondary liquid fuel, but the actual amount burned is limited by the supply available to about 40,000 tonnes per year.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what emission limits to air are in force at Castle Cement, Clitheroe, for *(a)* heavy metals, class I, II or III, *(b)* hydrogen fluoride, *(c)* hydrogen chloride, *(d)* sulphur dioxide, *(e)* nitrogen oxides and *(f)* carbon monoxide. [8046]

Mr. Clappison: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution will use the experience it has now gained about the use of substitute liquid fuel in the manufacture of cement, to set limits for these substances at Castle Cement, Clitheroe should it decide to allow the continued burning of Cemfuel at Clitheroe.

Packaging Directive

Mr. Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) when he expects to publish the regulations to implement the EU directive on packaging and packaging waste; [7759]

(2) when he expects to announce the principles underlying the regulations to implement the European Union directive on packaging and packaging waste. [7757]

Mr. Clappison: I am very pleased that representatives of the packaging industry were able to agree last month a proposal for a form of legal obligation to implement the recovery and recycling targets of the EC directive on packaging and packaging waste, 94/62/EC. This proposal was set out by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in reply to a question on 19 December 1995, *Official Report*, columns *1104–5*.

The Government will now need to consider and decide on the best form of legal obligation, taking account of all the relevant considerations. We hope to make an announcement on this shortly and to prepare draft regulations to implement the directive in order to issue them for consultation as soon as possible.

Water Supplies

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will ask the National Rivers Authority to report to him regarding the preparation by the water companies of contingency plans to safeguard water supplies in the event that below average rainfall continues for *(a)* a further 18 months and *(b)* longer. [7929]

Mr. Clappison: At the commission of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, the National Rivers Authority published on 18 December 1995 a report on measures to safeguard public water supplies. This report reviews water companies' strategies to conserve supplies in the event that below average rainfall continues into 1996 and confirms that the NRA will continue to keep the developing situation under review.

My right hon. Friend announced on 1 September a longer-term review of the lessons to be learnt from this summer's drought. The review will include the frequency assumptions for drought, progress with making supply systems flexible enough to cope with local shortage, and the implications of climate change.

Climate Change

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what elements of the CO_2 emission reduction programme outlined in "Climate Change: the UK Programme" are *(a)* delivering greater savings and *(b)* delivering less savings than initially expected. [7959]

Mr. Clappison: Key changes in expectations since publication of the UK climate change programme include greater savings from the energy supply and transport sectors, which more than outweigh reduced expectations from the Energy Saving Trust and VAT on domestic fuel and power. Further details are set out in "Climate Change—the UK Programme: Progress Report on Carbon Dioxide Emissions", published on 14 December 1995.

Mr. Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the most recent figures for United Kingdom annual CO_2 emissions. [7957]

Mr. Clappison: UK annual carbon dioxide emissions expressed as million tonnes of carbon are estimated to have been 158, 160, 155, 151 and 149 for the years 1990 to 1994 respectively. These figures were published in December 1995 in "Climate Change—the UK Programme: Progress Report on Carbon Dioxide Emissions". The 1994 estimate is provisional.

Moths and Butterflies

Sir Julian Critchley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the work of the European wildlife division in respect of its provision for bona fide collectors of moths and butterflies. [8234]

Mr. Clappison: Where species of butterfly or moth are endangered and subject to sales controls, the European wildlife division is responsible for the issue of sales licences. The performance target for issuing such licences is that 80 per cent. should be issued within 15 working days. The performance against this target is reviewed formally as part of the Department's annual review of resource needs. No specific complaints have been received in relation to the issue of sales licences.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from the construction industry regarding the private finance initiative. [8263]

Sir Paul Beresford: Ministers meet the construction industry regularly to discuss a wide variety of topics including the private finance initiative. On 12 October the industry submitted a helpful paper to the Government on the operation of the initiative. A copy of this paper has been placed in the Library of the House. My right hon. Friend and ministerial colleagues discussed this with the industry in November. Subsequently, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury issued an action plan for the PFI which responded to a number of industry's points. A copy of this has also been placed in the Library of the House. The Government are continuing their dialogue on the PFI with representative bodies from the construction industry.

Coal Mining

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will ensure that a firm of independent consultants carry out and complete an environmental assessment on both sides of the lower Derwent valley on the effects of coal mining, before permission is granted for any initial bore exploratory tunnels in that region; and if he will make a statement. [8429]

Sir Paul Beresford: No. It is for the mineral planning authority in the first instance to decide whether they require an environmental assessment for this particular planning application. Environmental assessment is required for development which would be likely to have significant effects on the environment. My Department does not consider that the proposal for exploratory tunnels in the Derwent valley area would have such an effect.

EU Environment Council

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Environment Council on 18 December 1995. [8967]

Mr. Gummer: Together with my noble Friend the Earl of Lindsay, I represented the UK at the Environment Council in Brussels on 18 December.

Common positions were reached on a directive amending directive 85/337 on environmental impact assessment and on a directive amending the emission standards for light vans with effect from October this year. In both cases, earlier concerns expressed by the United Kingdom about these proposals were met by revised proposals which were acceptable.

In responding to a Commission report explaining its proposed postponement and amendment of the regulations on leghold traps, I expressed serious disappointment at the Commission's proposals to postpone and amend the EC leghold traps regulation, and pressed for much tougher action to demonstrate the Community's commitment to bringing an end to the use of leghold traps worldwide.

The Council gave unanimous support to a statement by the United Kingdom calling on the Commission to make more rapid progress with the Community eco-labelling scheme.

Council conclusions were agreed on coastal policy, water policy, acidification, climate change and biodiversity. These will usefully help to shape more detailed discussions in the coming year.

The Council also took note of progress of the proposed directive on biocides. This, too, will continue to be discussed under the Italian presidency.

Access Committee for England

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the future of the Acess Committee for England. [3010]

Mr. Burt: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her on Monday 18 December 1995, *Official Report*, columns *944–45*.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Remand Prisoners (Compensation)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce a compensation scheme for loss of earnings and hardship for remand prisoners who are acquitted. [3522]

Mr. Kirkhope: Such a case would not fall within the statutory provision for compensation for miscarriages of justice. However, in accordance with the policy set out by my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) on 29 November 1995, columns *691–92*, we are prepared to pay compensation on an ex gratia basis to people who have spent a period in custody, following a conviction or charge, where we are satisfied that this has resulted from serious public default by a member of a police force or of some other public authority, or where there are other exceptional circumstances.

Crime (London)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes were recorded in each London borough by the Metropolitan police within each category of crime in the year to June 1995; how many incidents of theft or unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle and of theft from a motor vehicle were recorded in each borough; how many of the burglaries recorded in each borough were in a dwelling; and how many were in another building. [7439]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is contained in tables provided by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, copies of which are available in the Library.

Drugs (Arrests)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of those people arrested for drug offences in each of the last three years were *(a)* cautioned, *(b)* fined and *(c)* convicted; and of those convicted how many were given (i) community service sentences and (ii) terms of imprisonment. [7713]

Mr. Maclean: As detailed information on arrests is not collected centrally prosecution data have been included in the table.

Number of persons cautioned, prosecuted at magistrates' courts and found guilty at all courts for indictable drug offences by result 1992–1994

England and Wales

	1992	*1993*	*1994*
Cautions	27,594	35,098	44,350
Magistrates courts			
Prosecutions	28,302	27,081	34,605
All courts			
Convictions	22,677	21,897	27,796
of which sentenced to			
Fine	11,928	11,139	14,517
Community sentence[1]	2,614	3,319	4,376
Immediate custody[2]	3,676	3,599	4,028

[1] Includes probation, supervision, attendance, community service and combination orders.

[2] Includes young offender institution and unsuspended imprisonment.

Criminal Justice Act 1993

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to lay an order bringing part I of the Criminal Justice Act 1993 into operation. [7744]

Mr. Maclean: As I said in reply to a question from the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) on 19 July 1995, *Official Report*, column *1440*, we are considering the practicalities of bringing into force the provisions of part I of the Criminal Justice Act 1993.

Life Prisoners

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he has given to delegating authority to release prisoners imprisoned for life for murder; and if he will make a statement. [7950]

Mr. Maclean: Section 35 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991 provides that the Secretary of State may release a mandatory life sentence prisoner if recommended to do so by the parole board, and after consulting the Lord Chief Justice and, if available, the trial judge. The Home Secretary normally takes such decisions personally. The Government have no plans to change these arrangements.

Police Stations

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to collect information centrally and on an annual basis on the number of police stations which have *(a)* opened, *(b)* closed and *(c)* had their opening hours curtailed. [8123]

Mr. Maclean: No. These are operational matters for chief constables, in consultation with their police authorities where appropriate.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will issue guidance to police authorities to include in their annual policing plan proposals for the closure or curtailment of opening hours of police stations. [8124]

Mr. Maclean: No.

Crime (Merseyside)

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional funding he will make available to the police authority on Merseyside to combat violent crime. [8137]

Mr. Maclean: The overall effect of the Government's funding proposals for Merseyside police authority would be to provide a total spending power of £226.7 million in 1996–97, an increase of £8.14 million or 3.7 per cent. over 1995–96. It is for the chief constable to decide how to allocate his resources.

European Police Office

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to act on the requirement of article K3(2) of the treaty on European Union in respect of designating the convention on a European police office (Europol) CM3050, as a Community treaty by statutory instrument in accordance with section (3) of the European Communities Act 1972. [8304]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* There is nothing in article K3(2) of the treaty on European Union which requires the designation of the Europol convention as a Community treaty.

Title VI of the treaty of European Union, pursuant to which the Europol convention was concluded, is not one of the Community treaties for the purposes of the 1972 Act. Accordingly, there is no proposal to make an Order in Council under section 1(3) of the European Communities Act 1972 declaring that the Europol convention is to be so regarded.

Police Officers (Leicester)

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there were in post in Leicester in each year since 1993; and how many are proposed for 1996–97. [8207]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* The strength of the Leicestershire constabulary was as follows:

31 December 1993: 1,838

31 December 1994: 1,838

30 September 1995: 1,860.

It is for the police authority and the chief constable to determine the strength of the force in 1996–97.

Bosnia (Police Officers)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* civilian, *(b)* non-civilian police officers have been sent to Bosnia in the last six months; and how many is it planned to send under arrangements currently under discussion. [8184]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* Seven police officers have served in Bosnia in the past six months with the Western European Union police operation. We are currently considering the options for a possible future role for British police officers in Bosnia as part of the proposed United Nations civilian policing contingent.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many applications for bereavement payments under the criminal injuries compensation tariff scheme, which was withdrawn following the House of Lords ruling, were made (i) in total and (ii) by *(a)* parents of adult murder and manslaughter victims, *(b)* adult children of murder and manslaughter victims, *(c)* unmarried partners of murder and manslaughter victims and *(d)* fathers of illegitimate children who were murder and manslaughter victims; [7928]

(2) how many bereavement payments were made to applicants under the criminal injuries compensation tariff scheme, which was withdrawn following the House of Lords ruling (i) in total and (ii) to *(a)* parents of adult murder and manslaughter victims, *(b)* adult children or murder and manslaughter victims, *(c)* unmarried partners of murder and manslaughter victims and *(d)* fathers of illegitimate children who were murder and manslaughter victims. [7927]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answers given to him on 28 November 1995, *Official Report*, columns *652–53*, and 4 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *27*.

Police (Immediate Response Incidents)

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents requiring an immediate response were recorded by the police in terms of *(a)* crime, *(b)* disorder, *(c)* traffic, *(d)* alarms and *(e)* other, and what number of 999 calls were made in (i) 1993–94 and (ii) 1994–95 in each police force in England and Wales, with totals for England and for Wales. [7966]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* The figures for incidents requiring an immediate response and 999 calls recorded by the police in England and Wales are set out in the table. The nature of an incident requiring an immediate response is a matter for individual police forces, and the criteria vary between them. Data are collected only in terms of the total number of incidents requiring an immediate response, and cannot be disaggregated.

Forces	1993–94 Total 999 calls	1993–94 Incidents immediate response	1994–95 Total 999 calls	1994–95 Incidents immediate response
Avon and Somerset	88,235	82,913	159,800	36,599
Bedfordshire	43,200	1,142	51,192	[2]2,477
Cambridgeshire	53,504	29,406	58,805	33,171
Cheshire	75,094	[2]—	80,035	[2]—
City of London	[1]—	10,560	[1]—	8,169
Cleveland	67,398	3,580	84,346	9,512
Cumbria	33,985	30,152	34,729	28,915
Derbyshire	49,457	53,318	[2]—	48,475
Devon and Cornwall	102,391	26,324	121,798	91,989
Dorset	55,155	12,950	54,791	64,452
Durham	29,447	7,009	29,923	15,542
Essex	110,005	79,845	114,883	72,954
Gloucestershire	40,462	38,738	45,388	37,471
Greater Manchester	416,873	206,715	446,345	175,400
Hampshire	162,082	181,000	170,560	204,023
Hertfordshire	67,610	9,032	77,071	9,757
Humberside	85,632	76,650	88,300	64,704
Kent	130,015	33,707	141,769	43,415
Lancashire	71,986	101,032	102,984	83,240
Leicestershire	100,232	82,057	114,314	98,290
Lincolnshire	34,694	23,424	45,828	37,279
Merseyside	200,711	69,335	220,432	57,898
Metropolitan Police	1,347,207	488,426	1,534,978	418,809
Norfolk	37,143	55,276	48,984	43,817
North Yorkshire	31,956	8,880	56,646	3,661
Northamptonshire	25,027	56,875	32,256	36,520
Northumbria	213,369	95,223	224,569	93,832
Nottinghamshire	119,489	91,643	115,695	92,918
South Yorkshire	123,144	91,060	149,178	47,496
Staffordshire	58,935	32,559	65,266	20,652
Suffolk	22,521	25,307	30,253	26,073
Surrey	56,182	12,024	67,268	[1]11,386
Sussex	94,251	54,373	138,265	58,460
Thames Valley	125,754	130,401	195,016	52,271
Warwickshire	43,468	10,296	48,870	15,896
West Mercia	80,894	56,536	98,539	77,805
West Midlands	358,009	163,109	412,211	142,766
West Yorkshire	267,786	132,746	323,081	111,431
Wiltshire	25,000	41,362	42,768	37,976
England total	5,053,303	2,704,980	5,827,136	2,515,501
Dyfed-Powys	21,231	14,617	24,068	14,059
Gwent	32,191	36,131	35,360	37,832
North Wales	39,945	35,771	40,575	32,333
South Wales	150,370	90,600	158,006	83,251
Wales total	243,737	177,119	258,009	167,475

Notes:

[1] Forces which have based their figures on estimates.

[2] Data not available as collection systems were not in place or were being updated.

[3] 999 calls covered by Metropolitan police.

Source:

Figures supplied by forces to Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary.

Euro '96 Football Matches

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will allow those police authorities with direct responsibility for policing matches in Euro '96 to spend, if necessary, above the prescribed limit for 1996–97; and if he will make a statement. [7614]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* No. Funding for public order policing is included in the police grant settlement for 1996–97.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to make additional revenue available to those police authorities which will have responsibility for policing football matches during the Euro '96 competition; and if he will make a statement. [7616]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* No specific provision is being made available to police authorities for this purpose, but total funds for the police service are set to increase by around 4 per cent. in 1996–97 to £6.6 billion. The Football Trust has agreed to contribute to the capital costs of the police communications equipment that will be used during the competition. The cost of policing inside football stadiums will be met be the Football Association.

Asylum and Immigration Bill

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when and by what measures he has consulted the main organisations representing police constables concerning his proposals in the Asylum and Immigration Bill. [4468]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* A copy of our consultation exercise on the prevention of unauthorised employment has been sent to the Association of Chief Police Officers.

TREASURY

Interest Rates

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the position of United Kingdom interest rates relative to those of the United Kingdom's EU partners. [8204]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:*

Short and long-term interest rates in EU member states are published in tables 3.1 and 3.2 of "Money and Finance (Eurostat)" on a monthly basis. Table 1 gives three-month interbank interest rates and yields on 10-year bonds as of 8 January, for the UK and its EU partners.

EU interest rates

	10 year bonds	3-month interbank
UK	7.49	6.53
Austria	6.30	3.68
Belgium	6.62	3.74
Denmark	7.15	4.65
Finland	7.03	4.25
France	6.67	5.00
Germany	5.98	3.79
Greece	—	15.25
Ireland	7.33	5.58
Italy	10.65	10.38
Netherlands	5.96	3.49
Portugal	9.92	8.60
Spain	9.57	9.10
Sweden	8.34	8.60

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Burma

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the amount of humanitarian aid provided to Burma in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96; and if he will make a statement on its purpose. [7621]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* Our humanitarian aid to Burma over the last three financial years is as follows:

	£	Purpose
1993–94	1,400	Intravenous rehydration packs for Dengue fever victims
	22,589	Blankets and immediate relief items for fire victims
1994–95	5,000	Ringers Lactate Solution for Cholera victims
1995–96	43,512	Food, clothing and training in fire safety for fire victims
	19,108	Restoration of water and sanitation facilities for flood victims

In addition, the ODA has assisted refugees who have fled Burma into neighbouring countries. These contributions have been made through UNHCR, the International Federation of the Red Cross and non-governmental organisations. Amounts are as follows:

1993–94: £1,293,000

1994–95: £246,750

1995–96: £1,300,000.

Land Mines

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out the financial contribution made by his Department towards the cost of land mine clearance projects in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* the current financial year; and if he will make a statement. [7980]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* UK support to global humanitarian mine clearance operations in the last three financial years is as follows:

1993–94: £3.15 million

1994–95: £5.91 million

1995–96: £3.65 million (to date).

In addition the UK's share of European Community support for mine clearance is some £3.37 million since 1992.

Aid (Value)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the value, *(a)* at constant prices and *(b)* in cash terms of United Kingdom (i) bilateral and (ii) multilateral overseas aid has been in each financial year from 1991–92 to 1994–95; and what it is estimated to be in (1) 1995–96 and (2) each year to 1998–99. [8238]

Mr. Hanley: The information is as follows:

ODA bilateral and multilateral expenditure 1991–92 to 1995–96

£ million

	Cash price		*Constant 1995–96 prices*	
	Bilateral aid	*Multilateral aid*	*Bilateral aid*	*Multilateral aid*
1991–92	1,074	819	1,204	918
1992–93	1,125	934	1,212	1,006
1993–94	1,156	962	1,210	1,007
1994–95	1,120	1,117	1,151	1,148
1995–96[1]	1,126	1,131	1,126	1,131

[1] Estimated outturn. Planning figures for the period 1997–98 to 1998–99 are being finalised. As usual these figures will be published in the 1996 FCO departmental report in March.

Aid and Trade Provision

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth affairs what is the gross national product per capita limit for aid-for-trade provision projects; and if the limit applies at gross national product per capita prices. [8235]

Mr. Hanley: The countries eligible for ATP are those with a gross national product per capita of not more than $700 in 1989. Consideration is being given to updating this to the latest available year.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the value of United Kingdom bilateral aid to sub-Saharan Africa in each year since 1973–74 *(a)* at constant prices and *(b)* in cash terms. [8239]

Mr. Hanley: The total United Kingdom bilateral gross public expenditure on aid to countries in sub-Saharan Africa from 1973 to 1994–95 is set out in the table.

£000

	Cash prices	*Constant prices*[1]
1973	62,679	398,747
1974	71,938	398,350
1975	75,752	329,930
1976	102,710	388,567
1977	110,930	368,563
1978	169,912	505,916
1979	202,436	526,793
1980	243,894	531,059
1981	278,706	544,624
1982	234,760	426,348
1983	225,899	389,837
1984	249,808	412,150
1985	294,285	459,361
1986	268,520	405,871
1987[2]	297,670	428,660
1987–88	247,881	354,298
1988–89	396,774	531,541
1989–90	462,826	579,554
1990–91	485,887	563,275
1991–92	419,119	457,324
1992–93	502,929	527,317
1993–94	438,319	446,544
1994–95	462,254	462,254

[1] Calender year figures are given in 1994 prices while financial year figures are given in 1994–95 prices.

[2] Prior to 1987–88 figures are only available by calendar year.

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Britain's participation in EBRD. [6865]

Mr. Hanley: We fully support the European bank for reconstruction and development which has made impressive progress over the last two years under President Larosière. To enable it to continue its highly regarded work in promoting transition and private sector development in the countries of central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, we are participating actively in current discussions on a capital replenishment. The UK shareholding in the EBRD is 8.5 per cent. or 850 million ECU.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Companies Act

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many prosecutions there have been in breach of the Companies Act 1985; under what section each prosecution took place; and for what purpose in each year since the Act was passed. [7595]

Mr. John M. Taylor: In cases where the prosecution was brought by my Department, information on prosecutions under the Companies Act 1985 is contained in the Companies annual report which is laid before both Houses of Parliament in accordance with section 729 of the Companies Act 1985. This report does not include information on prosecutions brought by other prosecuting authorities, for example the DPP and the SFO, and records for these are not maintained within the Department.

Carpets (Belgian Beaulieu Group)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what share of British markets for carpets is held by the Belgian Beaulieu Group. [8071]

Mr. Eggar: Statistics specific to Beaulieu products are not available.

In 1994, total Belgian exports of carpets to the UK were £184 million. This accounted for 14.7 per cent. of the UK market and 39 per cent. of all UK carpet imports.

Unfair Dismissal (Appeals)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many applications for appeal against unfair dismissal have been made to each employment office in the United Kingdom in the last year. [8075]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Applications to the industrial tribunals are registered by their central offices in Bury St. Edmunds, for England and Wales, and Glasgow, for Scotland. The number of registered applications alleging unfair dismissal in 1994–95 was 35,610 for England and Wales and 3,832 for Scotland.

Algeria (Export Credits Guarantee)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his Department's policy towards the availability of export credits guarantee for business in Algeria. [7997]

Mr. Nelson: There is no ECGD medium/long-term cover for business with Algeria.

Human Genetics

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the Government will respond to the third report of the Science and Technology Committee of Session 1994–95, "Human Genetics, the Science and its Consequences" (HC 41.I) [8690]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Government have published today their response to the Select Committee's report on "Human Genetics: The Science and its Consequences". Copies of the response have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The response emphasises the excellence of UK genetic research and the opportunities which it offers for improving the country's competitiveness and quality of life. However, it also recognises the sensitivities which can apply to the application of genetics on health care and other fields. The response refers to the establishment of a new advisory body on genetic testing, to complement existing arrangements for addressing the ethical aspects of medical research. Details will be announced separately by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Fossil Fuel Levy

Mr. Hardy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the total sum raised by the fossil fuel levy borne by electricity consumers since this levy was introduced; and what sum this represents for the average electricity consumer. [7839]

Mr. Page: The total sum raised by the fossil fuel levy between 1 April 1990 and 31 March 1995—the latest data available—was £6,285 million. Over the same period, an average domestic electricity customer has paid about £135 towards the levy.

Timeshare Directive

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 13 December, *Official Report*, column *640*, what considerations led to his not yet having initiated a consultation exercise to implement the 1994 timeshare directive; and if he will estimate the number of timeshare purchasers affected as a result of the interval. [7981]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* The deadline for implementing the timeshare directive is 29 April 1997. We plan to meet that deadline. With this in mind a consultation paper will be issued shortly. We intend to lay regulations before Parliament early in 1997. Purchasers of timeshare in the UK are already protected under the UK Timeshare Act 1992, and we believe no consumer will be adversely affected by our timetable.

Nuclear Industry (Privatisation)

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the total expenditure on management and financial consultants employed by the Department to advise on the sale of Nuclear Electric and Scottish Nuclear; and what estimate he has made of future expenditure. [8013]

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* The Department has provision for expenditure of £25 million in 1995–96 on restructuring and privatisation of the nuclear power generation industry. Actual expenditure will be reported to Parliament in the normal way through the appropriation account. Details of estimated expenditure in 1996–97 will be published in due course in the supply estimates.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which companies are currently employed to advise on the privatisation of Nuclear Electric and Scottish Nuclear; and on what aspects. [8014]

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* The following advisers are currently employed in connection with the privatisation of Nuclear Electric and Scottish Nuclear.

Adviser	*Area*
Addison Design	Design company
Allen and Overy	Legal adviser (England and Wales)
Barclays de Zoete Wedd	Financial adviser/Global co-ordinator
Binder Hamlyn	Joint reporting accountant[1]
Brodies	Legal adviser (Scotland)
Cluttons	Property valuer
Davis Polk and Wardwell	Legal adviser (US)
Dewe Rogerson	PR/Marketing adviser[1]
Jonathan Sumption QC	Legal advice
London Economics	Electricity pool price modelling
Lowe Howard-Spink	Advertising agency[1]
Mail Marketing (Bristol)	Mailing house
Matthew Clarke QC	Legal advice
Price Waterhouse	Joint reporting accountant[1]
Solid Solutions Associates	Retail adviser
Stone & Webster and Electrowatt	Joint technical consultants
The Database Group	Database manager
Tillinghast	Insurance adviser
Touche Ross	Accountancy adviser
Watson Wyatt	Actuary
Williams Lea	Printer

[1] Appointed jointly with British Energy.

DEFENCE

Executive Agencies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if answers sent to hon. Members in reply to parliamentary questions by the head of executive agencies in his Department are *(a)* seen, *(b)* approved and *(c)* amended by him before they are sent; and if he will identify such letters to which amendments by him have been made in 1994–95. [7832]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Parliamentary questions are passed to the head of an executive agency for reply when the matter is delegated to him or her under the agency framework document. The relevant Minister normally sees a copy of the reply before it is sent, but would not normally intervene in operational matters. No record is kept of occasions when Ministers propose amendments to the terms of a chief executive's reply, though such instances are rare.

Trident

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate was made of the cost of the work to be undertaken at the atomic weapons establishment Aldermaston in support of the Trident programme before the work commenced. [8269]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I have nothing to add to the reply given to the hon. Member on 16 October 1995, *Official Report*, column *36*.

Directorate of Accounts (Bills)

Mr. Dicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about defence agency status for the Directorate of Accounts (Bills). [8535]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Directorate of Accounts (Bills) became a defence agency of the Ministry of Defence on 1 January 1996 following the restructuring of the Defence Accounts Agency. The agency, to be known as the Defence Bills Agency, is located in Liverpool and has a staff of 652 MoD civil servants. The agency is responsible for the authorisation and payment of bills from MoD's suppliers and contractors and the invoicing and collection of MoD receipts. In addition, the agency will maintain accounting records for the MoD central ledger and provide financial management information to budget holders and other MoD customers including other defence agencies.

As part of the Government's "Competing for Quality" initiative, the Directorate of Accounts (Bills) underwent a market testing feasibility study. As a result of this it was decided to keep the work of the directorate in house and to set challenging efficiency targets. These have been met and the in-house team and has been awarded a three-year fixed-price service level agreement effective from 1 April 1996. Embodied within the SLA are efficiency savings of over 27 per cent. measured against a baseline of the agency's 1993–94 outturn and these will be achieved by 31 March 1996.

The former Director of Accounts (Bills), Mr. M. A. Rowe, is the acting chief executive, pending the results of an open competition to appoint a successor. The chief executive will be seeking to develop the current organisation's professional expertise and improve the high performance standards to fulfil the agency's aim of providing its customers with an efficient service which offers the best value for money. The chief executive has been set the following key targets:

1. To pay 97 per cent. of correctly presented bills within 11 working days of receipt and 100 per cent. within 30 days of receipt.
2. To raise 100 per cent. of invoices within 5 working days of instruction.
3. To obtain ISO 9002 accreditation.
4. To review the DBA internal management information/costing system.
5. To develop an accruals accounting system.
6. To make financial management information available on diskette each week to all MoD customers.
7. To meet 100 per cent. of the performance criteria laid down in the SLA.
8. To deliver the service contracted for in the SLA at the agreed price.

Copies of the agency's framework document are being placed in Library of the House.

HEALTH

Nurses (Sunderland)

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will give, for each year since 1989, the total number of *(a)* district nurses, *(b)* health visitors, *(c)* practice nurses, *(d)* midwives and *(e)* nursery nurses employed by Sunderland district health authority; [6308]

(2) if he will give, for each year since 1989, the total number and the percentage of *(a)* district nurses, *(b)* health visitors, *(c)* practice nurses and *(d)* midwives employed by Sunderland district health authority on Whitley council or equivalent employment grades. [6309]

Mr. Horam: The information available is shown in the tables.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services District Nurses, Health Visitors, Midwives and Nursery Nurses employed by Sunderland Health Authority (DHA) at 30 September 1989 to 1994[1]

Whole-time equivalents

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*[4]1994*
District Nurses[2]	80	90	90	100	80	—
Health Visitors[3]	70	80	70	70	60	—
Midwives	150	160	160	150	140	—
Nursery Nurses	—	—	—	—	—	—

Notes:

[1] All staff in groups specified were employed by Sunderland DHA on Whitley council pay scales.

[2] Excludes senior nurses 1–5. Includes senior nurses 6–8 in health visiting, health visitors, HV fieldwork teachers, school health visitors, TB visitors with HV certificates, bank health visitors and dual/triple posts (HV/DN/Mid).

[3] Excludes senior nurses 1–5. Includes senior nurses 6—8 in district nursing, district nurses, district nurse practical work teachers, holders of dual post (DN/midwife), and bank district nurses.

[4] There were no staff in the groups specified employed by Sunderland DHA at September 1994 because on 1 April 1994 the two directly managed units in Sunderland DHA attained NHS trust status. There were 80 district nurses, 60 health visitors, 130 midwives and no nursery nurses employed by these NHS trusts at 30 September 1994.

— denotes zero.

All figures rounded to the nearest 10.

Source:

Department of Health non-medical workforce census.

General medical services practice nurses employed in Sunderland Family Health Services Authority (FHSA) at 1 October 1989–1994

Whole-time equivalents

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Practice Nurses	10	30	40	40	40	40

Notes:

GMS practice nurses are not FHSA employees.

Figures are rounded to the nearest 10 whole-time equivalents.

Source:

Department of Health bi-annual census of general medical practitioners.

King's Fund

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what sums were given by his Department to *(a)* the King's Fund institute and *(b)* the King's Fund college in each of the last six years. [6228]

Mr. Horam: The Department has made the following grants to the King's Fund in the last six years:

Towards the running costs of the King's Fund centre:

Years

1989–90: £540,000

1990–91: £567,000

1991–92: £600,000

1992–93: £627,000

1993–94: £639,000

1994–95: £665,000.

Section 64 general scheme grants to the centre

	Carers impact project £	*Community participation project* £	*Contracts project* £	*Positive action project* £
1989–90	0	16,000	0	0
1990–91	0	30,000	0	0
1991–92	0	28,000	0	0
1992–93	75,000	9,500	20,000	25,000
1993–94	75,000	0	30,000	25,000
1994–95	75,000	0	30,000	25,000

No grants have been made specifically to the King's Fund institute or the King's Fund college but various ad hoc payments have been made to the King's Fund over the last six years in respect of individual projects and conferences. Some of these payments may have related to activities of the institute or college but this could be confirmed only at disproportionate cost.

Tobacco Advertising

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he has received from the chief medical officer in respect of banning tobacco advertising. [7674]

Mr. Malone: The advice to Ministers is treated as confidential. The Department of Health's assessment of the effects of tobacco advertising is contained in the "Effect of Tobacco Advertising on Tobacco Consumption", a discussion document published in October 1992, copies of which are available in the Library.

Executive Agencies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if answers sent to hon. Members in reply to parliamentary questions by the heads of executive agencies in his Department are *(a)* seen, *(b)* approved and *(c)* amended by him before they are sent; and if he will identify such letters to which amendments by him have been made in 1994–95. [7834]

Mr. Horam: Parliamentary questions are passed to the head of an executive agency for reply when the matter is one delegated to him under the agency framework document. The relevant Minister may see a copy of the reply before it is sent, but would not normally intervene

in operational matters. The available information shows that no letters have been amended by Ministers of the Department, but no formal record is kept.

Genetic Testing

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements are being put in place to oversee developments in genetic testing. [8536]

Mr. Horam: As announced today in the Government response to the report of the Select Committee on Science and Technology, an advisory committee on genetic testing will be established to consider and advise on the ethical, social and scientific aspects of genetic testing. I am pleased to announce that the Rev. Dr. John Polkinghorne FRS, president, Queen's college, Cambridge has agreed to chair the committee. A copy of the press release that I am issuing today will be placed in the Library.

Private Home Care Agencies

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce regulation of private home care agencies to protect *(a)* existing users and disabled people who use such agencies and *(b)* others who may do so when the Community Care (Direct Payments) Bill is enacted; and if he will make a statement. [7766]

Mr. Bowis: On 22 September 1995 we published a consultation document, "Moving Forward", on the regulation and inspection of social services. Among other issues, it seeks views on whether statutory regulation should be extended to day and domiciliary care services. We shall decide on what action, if any, to take in the light of this review, including any implications for people who in the future may receive direct payments if Parliament approves the Community Care (Direct Payments) Bill. Copies of the consultation document are available in the Library.

Paracetamol

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has *(a)* to encourage the use of protected paracetamol and *(b)* to discourage the use of paracetamol products that do not include methodine. [7840]

Mr. Malone: There are no plans. Paracetamol is a safe and effective pain killer when used at the recommended dose. Paracetamol-methionine combinations have been assessed by the Medicines Control Agency and are authorised for sale from pharmacies. They may be preferred where there is a risk of an overdose.

Drug Deaths

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people died in each of the past five years as a result of the use of *(a)* tobacco, *(b)* alcohol, *(c)* medicinal drugs, *(d)* heroin, *(e)* solvents, *(f)* ecstasy and *(g)* cannabis. [7841]

Mr. Bowis: It is estimated that in the Untied Kingdom about 110,000 deaths each year are smoking related.

It is not easy to estimate the annual number of deaths in the UK directly caused by alcohol consumption. Estimates in academic literature range between 5,000 and 40,000 deaths in England and Wales per annum, and reflect a wide range of methodological approaches. There is therefore currently no universally acceptable mortality figure.

Deaths from medicinal drugs are shown below.

1988: 1,859
1989: 1,712
1990: 1,771
1991: 1,791
1992: 1,971.

Data on heroin, ecstasy and cannabis are contained in table 10 of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys publication "Mortality Statistics: Injury and poisoning" Series DH4. Copies of this publication are available in the Library.

Deaths from solvents are as follows:

1989: 113
1990: 151
1991: 122
1992: 84
1993: 73.

Cancer

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were diagnosed as suffering from cancer in each standard region of the United Kingdom, for England as a whole, and for the United Kingdom, for each of the last available three years, expressing each figure as a percentage of the corresponding population. [8087]

Mr. Horam: Data on registrations of newly diagnosed cases of cancer for England, by region, and Wales were published in tables 7 and 9 of the following publication "Cancer Statistics—Registrations", series MB1 No. 20: 1987; No. 21: 1988, and No. 22: 1989. Copies of all three publications are available in the Library.

Information relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

"NHS Workforce in England"

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to publish the next edition of "NHS Workforce in England". [8286]

Mr. Malone: No further editions of "NHS Workforce in England" are planned following a readership survey which indicated that the book was of little interest. The publication has been replaced by a set of summary tables which provide the information most often requested. These tables, containing information from the 1994 non-medical work force census, will be available shortly.

Nursing Students

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many pre-registration nursing and midwifery students commenced training as initial entrants by means of *(a)* salaried student places, *(b)* Project 2000 and *(c)* undergraduate study in each of the last five years; [8287]

(2) how many pre-registration nursing and midwifery students who commenced training as initial entrants by means of *(a)* salaried student places, *(b)* Project 2000 and *(c)* undergraduate study gave up their training in (i) the first year, (ii) the second year and (iii) the third year in each of the last five years; [8288]

(3) how many pre-registration nursing and midwifery students who commenced training as initial entrants by means of *(a)* salaried student places, *(b)* Project 2000 and *(c)* undergraduate study gave up their courses for each year of training in each of the last five years; [8289]

(4) how many pre-registration nursing and midwifery students who commenced training as initial entrants by means of *(a)* salaried student places, *(b)* Project 2000 and *(c)* undergraduate study (i) qualified and (ii) registered with the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting in each of the last five years. [8290]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how he intends to estimate demand for nurses from the non-NHS sector; and how this information will be used to regulate the supply of nursing students. [8294]

Mr. Horam: Work force planning will continue to be undertaken by local employers. National health service employers together with health authorities will join together with other providers of healthcare to estimate demand for nurses. These estimates will be translated on to contracts for training places. The NHS Executive headquarters will maintain a national overview.

Registered Nurses

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total number of second level registered nurses; and how many are currently undertaking training to convert to first level registration. [8291]

Mr. Horam: This information is not held centrally. I refer the hon. Member to the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for information concerning the former and to the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for the latter.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by what means he assesses the demand for conversion courses for second-level registered nurses. [8292]

Mr. Horam: It is for national health service trusts to determine the qualifications and number of staff they require and, in consultation with their regional health authority, to commission conversion courses for second-level registered nurses to meet these needs.

Health Service Planning

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which *(a)* papers, *(b)* studies and *(c)* other works the Department of Health has (i) published and (ii) is currently undertaking which examine work force planning. [8293]

Mr. Malone: "Managing the New NHS" (1993) notes the need for the NHS to secure staffing resources to achieve its objectives and that NHS central management will retain responsibility for securing the future supply of skilled professional staff. "Managing the New NHS: Functions and Responsibilities in the New NHS" (1994) sets out how this will be done, including the role of the regional education and development groups, which includes postgraduate medical deans, and consortia of trusts and purchasers. "Priorities and Planning Guidance for the NHS, 1996–97" sets out the main objectives covering human resources and work force planning.

The Department is currently developing a new initiative on medical staffing policy and arrangements for the hospital community health services and is advised on medical staffing matters by three advisory groups, the Medical Work Force Standing Advisory Committee, the Advisory Group on Medical and Dental Education, Training and Staffing and the Specialist Workforce Advisory Group.

In 1995 the Department published "The Non Medical Health Care Professions National Work Force Balance Sheet" with associated guidelines and the "Non Medical Education and Training—Planning Guidance for 1996–97", education commissioning (EL(95)96).

In 1996, it is planned to publish "The Non Medical Education and Training Information Requirements" and associated guidelines and the "Non Medical Education and Training—Planning Guidance for 1997–98". In addition, the NHS executive will publish a guide to work force planning in consortia.

Copies of the documents are available in the Library.

Goods and Services

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department paid to the private sector for goods and services in 1994–95. [6504]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* The Department's payment systems do not separately identify payments between the public and private sector. From an examination of the payment records of the Department and its agencies it is estimated that payments of about £140 million were made to the private sector for goods and services in 1994–95.

SCOTLAND

Private Patients

Mr. George Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total income received from private patients in each health board in Scotland in each year since 1989–90. [7169]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Since 1992–93 the provision of health care in Scotland has been split between health boards and NHS trusts. Private patient income figures for both health boards and NHS trusts are set out in the table. The figures for Greater Glasgow in 1993–94 and Lothian in 1994–95 include overseas patients, and can therefore not be compared directly with other years.

£000

Health board area	1989–90	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
Argyll and Clyde	69	57	49	43	36	27
Ayr and Arran	144	174	234	142	115	169
Borders	22	32	42	52	32	52
Dumfries and Galloway	3	5	6	6	8	35
Fife	1	1	4	0	1	0
Forth Valley	82	22	37	33	55	69
Grampian	304	328	473	563	567	710
Greater Glasgow	34	43	12	19	485	226
Highland	28	37	54	60	117	176
Lanarkshire	0	0	0	0	1	0
Lothian	212	255	548	608	802	1,251
Orkney	0	0	0	0	0	0
Shetland	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tayside	130	162	184	193	244	232
Western Isles	0	0	0	0	0	0
Scotland total	1,029	1,116	1,643	1,719	2,463	2,947

Secondary Schools

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those secondary schools in Scotland that do not have another secondary school within a walking distance of 4.8 km. [7745]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: This information is not held centrally.

Sentencing Costs

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the average annual cost for *(a)* each prisoner in custody and *(b)* community disposals with particular reference to probation/community support programmes. [7751]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The annual cost per prisoner place in HM prisons in Scotland in 1994–95, calculated as total net expenditure, excluding capital, divided by the average number of places available, was £26,479. The average cost per order in 1994–95 of probation and community service in Scotland was £1,446 respectively.

Priority Partnership Initiatives

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what new priority partnership initiatives he plans to launch in 1996–97; and if he will consider new applications for priority partnership area initiatives in that year. [7760]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: My right hon. Friend will only be responsible for the designation of priority partnership areas if the urban programme continues as a specific grant. If it does not, such matters will be for local decision. The future of the urban programme as a specific grant is currently the subject of public consultation.

Local Authorities (Adverse Weather)

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the performance of local authorities in Scotland during the recent adverse weather conditions; and if he will make a statement. [8968]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I am happy to pay tribute to the dedication of all of the staff of local authorities, electricity and gas companies and emergency services who coped superbly with a very difficult combination of weather over the holiday period. This is the second year running that, over Christmas and new year, life for large numbers of Scots has been severely disrupted by such natural events and we are well served by the people who work to make it possible for things to return to normal as soon as possible.

Some snow fell in the days before Christmas, but heavy snowfalls were experienced in parts of northern Scotland on Christmas day. The area worst affected was the Shetland Islands where a record depth of 35 cm fell and where communities were cut off from each other and power supplies were severely disrupted. Throughout the country, temperatures dropped to sub-zero levels on 20 December, but many mainland areas experienced severe conditions between 25 and 30 December when temperatures dropped in some areas to record levels. In Altnaharra, minus 27 degrees was recorded and in Glasgow the temperature fell to minus 20 degrees, causing the River Clyde to freeze over. Both of these were the lowest temperatures ever recorded. The thaw set in on 30 December.

The first problem to present itself was as a result of the severe blizzards on Christmas day. Generally, this caused disruption to traffic, but this was not particularly severe or long lasting. Exceptionally, the Shetland Isles experienced very heavy snow falls which presented particular problems for Scottish Hydro Electric due to major disruption of power supplies. Access to the disrupted power lines was extremely difficult and, in the circumstances, supplies were restored in very good time.

The severe frosts between 25 and 30 December led to very many parts of the water supply system freezing, understandable in record low temperatures. As a result, there were numerous bursts, mainly on small diameter piping belonging to domestic and commercial consumers, although larger pipes in the ownership of water authorities and industrial consumers also suffered. The incidence of such low temperatures whenever they occurred would undoubtedly have had a severe effect on water supplies. Over the holiday period, however, this effect was exacerbated. Many domestic, commercial and industrial premises were left empty with only limited heating, if any. Few systems were drained as would have been the

practice 20 years ago since we have all tended to become dependant on the improved levels of heating and insulation of our properties.

Sadly, but inevitably, in the circumstances an unprecedented number of bursts came to light during the rapid thaw on 29 to 31 December. These resulted in increases in demand on the water supply systems with which some could not cope. Demand rose to over 150 per cent. of average flow rates in some areas. While such peaks can be sustained for a period, the capacity of the distribution system and on-line storages cannot keep this up for days on end. Treatment works were stretched well beyond their capacity and inevitably limited numbers of consumers did not receive supplies where their properties were at high levels, at the end of major distribution systems or the system was drained by major bursts close by.

The response of the various service authorities to these problems was very good. Contingency plans proved fully effective and the effort put into emergency planning by authorities in recent years paid off. My ministerial colleagues and I can confirm this at first hand from our visits and discussions with staff concerned.

In particular, the water authorities in some areas were overwhelmed by calls by the public reporting problems with supplies. In extreme cases, such as Aberdeen, they were forced to cut off supplies to industrial premises, closed over the holiday, in order to maximise supplies available to domestic consumers. To cope with this situation, authorities called in staff to deal with telephone calls, monitor closely the distribution systems and deal with bursts on their own mains which were occurring at increased frequency. While some water authorities were stretched close to the limit, none sought assistance from central Government.

Inevitably, there was great concern by the public about the impact of these events. The media were quick to highlight difficulties but, in so doing, sometimes displayed unrealistic expectations. Criticism, for example, of electricity workers in Shetland were particularly misplaced. Similar criticism of Government and water authorities in the aftermath of the thaw was frequently made. The media have their part to play in getting through to the public reliable information about what is going on.

Some people have suggested that no information was provided to the public. On the contrary, water authorities in the areas most seriously affected had been active in providing advice and information to the public—starting in the autumn, they published, as they do every year, the precautions that consumers need to take against frost damage. Similarly, during the holiday period, representatives of authorities made appearances on television and spoke to local radio as well as issuing up-to-the-minute news releases, including guidance for householders. The contribution in particularly hard pressed areas from local radio, particularly in the shape of helplines, was very effective and I willingly pay tribute to this initiative.

Clearly, there are considerable financial consequences for individuals and authorities as a result of these events. It is too soon to estimate the costs. In the case of public and private properties, whether domestic or industrial, the primary responsibility is on the owner to protect himself against risks of this nature. In most cases, appropriate insurance is clearly essential. It is no part of the role of Government to act as an insurer of last resort. However, there is help which the Government can make, and have made, available during this difficult period. The Benefits Agency out of hours system has been available to provide assistance to vulnerable people. In appropriate circumstances, grants or loans have been made available to help with difficulties arising from the aftermath of the thaw and resulting burst pipes. Local authority services have responded, not least to those made homeless. For local authorities, exceptional assistance is available via the Bellwin scheme to cover certain well defined circumstances. Grants can be made available to help with costs incurred in providing relief and carrying out immediate works. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary and I stand ready to consider sympathetically applications from authorities where the relevant criteria have been met.

Lessons for the future have to be drawn from such events. I have established a working party to look for these lessons—not to look for scapegoats or carry out whitewash but to learn practical lessons. Representatives of agencies involved will be invited to participate. The report will be published. I will be happy to receive constructive suggestions for improved arrangements.

Prescription Charges

Mr. George Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been *(a)* the amount raised from prescription charges within the NHS in Scotland and *(b)* the expenditure on the system of NHS prescription for medication within the NHS in Scotland; and if he will give the difference between *(a)* and *(b)* in each year since 1979–80. [6156]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The information for the financial years 1979–80 to 1994–95 is set out in the table. The information shows *(a)* the annual income from NHS prescription charges paid by patients in respect of drugs and appliances dispensed by community pharmacists, dispensing doctors and appliance suppliers and the sums collected in respect of the sale of prepayment certificates; *(b)* the net ingredient cost of the drugs and appliances and the remuneration paid to community pharmacists, dispensing doctors and appliance suppliers for dispensing these drugs and appliances, and *(c)* the difference between *(a)* and *(b)*.

£ million

Year	*(a) Annual income*	*(b) Annual expenditure*	*(c) Difference between (a) and (b)*
1979–80	4.38	99.94	95.56
1980–81	7.87	120.63	112.76
1981–82	10.27	137.57	127.30
1982–83	11.89	155.86	143.97
1983–84	12.87	172.02	159.15
1984–85	14.03	183.56	169.53
1985–86	15.62	195.30	179.68
1986–87	19.00	211.91	192.91
1987–88	18.25	235.98	217.73
1988–89	19.82	262.59	242.77
1989–90	21.69	292.82	271.13
1990–91	23.03	320.89	297.86

£ million

Year	(a) Annual income	(b) Annual expenditure	(c) Difference between (a) and (b)
1991–92	25.51	359.55	334.04
1992–93	27.87	402.78	374.91
1993–94	30.51	435.97	405.46
1994–95	33.23	473.44	440.21

Investors in People

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps his Department is taking to achieve Investor in People status; when they started the process; when they expect to achieve Investor in People status; and if he will make a statement. [2982]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 30 November 1995]:* The Scottish Office, associated departments and agencies has been committed to becoming an Investor in People since 1991. The "whole Department" approach to meeting the standard has proved to be both challenging and beneficial; preparations have included a self-assessment exercise; and a wide-ranging staff survey on development and communications.

When I came to the Scottish Office, I set a target of obtaining Investor in People status by December 1996. I am confident that the Scottish Office will achieve this.

TRANSPORT

Stowaways

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what arrangements he makes for the safe passage and safe return of ship stowaways. [7702]

Mr. Norris: There is currently no international agreement on dealing with stowaways. The UK, however, is concerned about the increase in the number of stowaway incidents and is currently taking the issue forward in the International Maritime Organisation. We are developing international guidelines on the responsibilities of all parties involved in dealing with stowaways.

I understand that a stowaway arriving in the United Kingdom is examined by the immigration service and that the arrangements for his or her removal, where applicable, are usually made by the agents for the vessel following directions given to them under the Immigration Act.

Toll Bridges (Deregulation)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce the results of his consultation on deregulation of charging on toll bridges; and if he will make a statement. [8223]

Mr. Watts: I hope to make an announcement shortly.

Railways (Grants)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the estimated predicted levels of public service obligation grant payable to the railways in each of the years from 1995–96 to 2003–4. [7772]

Mr. Watts: Support for passenger rail services is now paid by the franchising director under section 52 of the Railways Act 1993. He expects to pay grant of some £1,600 million in 1995–96. The Government remain committed to providing grant to support passenger services. The grant level in 1996–97 and beyond will depend on the outcome of competitions for passenger franchises. The Government are confident that private sector franchises will offer better value for money for passengers and taxpayers, as clearly indicated by the first three franchises announced in December.

Road Improvement Schemes

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list each of the proposed road improvement schemes which were due to be started in *(a)* South Yorkshire, *(b)* West Yorkshire, *(c)* North Yorkshire and *(d)* Humberside which have now been (i) abandoned or (ii) suspended; and if he will make a statement. [8447]

Mr. Watts: Following the recent review of the trunk road programme the list of schemes placed in each category is set out:

Longer-term programme schemes

A1 (M) Leeming-Scotch Corner, North Yorkshire

A1 (M) Dishforth-Leeming, North Yorkshire

A65 Coniston Cold Bypass, North Yorkshire

A650 Shipley Eastern Bypass, Bradford MB.

The longer-term programme comprises those schemes, which although required, are not of the highest priority nationally. They will be taken forward only as the main programme is completed.

Withdrawn schemes

A19 Thormanby Bypass, North Yorkshire

A19 Shipton by Beningborough Bypass, North Yorkshire

A64 York-Malton Bypass Improvement, North Yorkshire

A64 Malton-Seamer Bypass, North Yorkshire

A65 Ilkley Bypass, North Yorkshire

A616/A628 Salters Brook-Stocksbridge Improvement, Barnsley MB, Sheffield MB

A1079 Shiptonthorpe Bypass, Humberside.

EU Transport Council

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the result of the Transport Council held in Brussels on 7 and 8 December 1995. [8944]

Sir George Young: The Transport Council met in Brussels on 7 and 8 December. My noble Friend the Minister for Aviation and Shipping represented the United Kingdom.

The Council reached a common position on a directive to introduce greater competition in ground handling services at European Community airports. The directive includes a provision suspending its application to Gibraltar until arrangements agreed between the UK and Spain in 1987 in relation to Gibraltar airport have been implemented. The UK will enter a statement in the Council minutes emphasising that in principle the

directive applies to Gibraltar, and that the suspension does not affect the position on sovereignty over the territory in which the airport is situated.

The Council also reached a common position on a directive allowing member states to issue driving licences in the form of a plastic card. The Council accepted an amendment, proposed by the UK, which reserves space in the licence for member states to record information of their own. The amendment would make it possible for the driving licence, with additional identity information, to be used as a voluntary identity card in the UK, although the Government have not yet taken any decision on this issue.

The Council agreed to amend the regulation governing state aids for combined transport, extending its application until the end of 1997.

The Council agreed conclusions noting a communication from the Commission on a package of measures to reform the inland waterways industry in the Community.

The Council agreed mandates for the Community to negotiate a road goods transport agreement with Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania, and a road passenger transport agreement with up to 14 central and eastern European states.

The Council reached political agreement on a directive to provide a framework for harmonising the standards applying to safety and environmental protection equipment carried by merchant ships for EC member states. This will help to improve safety and promote a single market for marine equipment.

The Council adopted a resolution on measures to promote short sea shipping and related ports services.

The Commission reported that the Council on the impact of the regulation and maritime cabotage adopted by the Council in 1992.

The Council discussed the conclusions of the recent International Maritime Organisation conference on ferry safety. The UK and other member states welcomed an invitation from Sweden to a meeting next month to secure higher safety standards for roll-on roll-off ferries in north-west Europe.

Other issues raised at the Council included air transport relations with the United States, on which the Commission gave an initial presentation of the economic analysis requested at the June 1995 meeting of the Transport Council.

The only vote at the Council was on the ground-handling directive, which Germany and Austria opposed.

Highways Agency

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he plans to amend the Highways Agency's 1995–96 key business plan targets. [8534]

Mr. Watts: As a consequence of the change to the trunk road programme announced on 28 November and published in "Managing the Trunk Road Programme", and the need to avoid over-committing funds for 1996–97, a number of business plan targets for the current financial year need to be amended. These include reducing the length of motorway and trunk road to be renewed from 134 and 262 nearside lane kilometres—nlks—to 110 and 220 nlks respectively, and deferring a number of milestone targets for the preparation of individual schemes. A full list of amendments has been placed in the Library.

The following 1995–96 targets are deferred, reflecting the new timing or priority of these schemes announced on 28 November:

Start of Works

A12 Hackney—M11 (Contract 1)

A12 Hackney—M11 (Contract 3)

A40 Gypsy Corner Improvement

A40 Western Circus Junction Improvement.

The above schemes feature in table 3 of "Managing the Trunk Road Programme" as schemes now due to start by the end of the financial year 1996–97.

A406/A1/A598 Regents Park Road Junction improvement

Preferred Route

M1 Junctions 25–28 Widening

M11 Junctions 8–9 Widening

A6 Kibworth Bypass

Public Inquiry

M1 Junctions 10–15 Widening

M6 Junctions 11–16 Widening

M6 Junctions 16–20 Widening.

The following 1995–96 targets are withdrawn, reflecting the schemes' changed status:

Start of Works

A65 Manor Park Bends Improvement (now Regional Programme)

A65 Hellifield and Long Preston Bypass (now DBFO)

Preferred Route

A59 Bank Hall Diversion (withdrawn).

Civil Aviation Authority

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the Civil Aviation Authority's external finance limit. [8966]

Mr. Norris: The Civil Aviation Authority's external finance limit for 1995–96 will be £35.954 million. This amount is made up of the following:

(i) the original external finance limit of £27.9 million as agreed in the 1994 public expenditure survey;

(ii) plus £8.054 million, in respect of;

(a) the carry forward of an underspend of £5.975 million from 1994–95 under Treasury end-year flexibility rules, which will be funded from the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure; and

(b) £2.079 million, resulting from a one-off cash transfer from the CAA to Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd. The cash transfer relates to the transfer of ownership of HIAL from the CAA to the Scottish Office, and is in respect of HIAL liabilities expected to arise in this financial year.

The CAA's external finance limit for future years will be as follows:

1996–97: £13.4 million

1997–98: £22.9 million

1998–99: £22.9 million.

The limits are negative because in these years the CAA's repayment of past Government loans will exceed its new borrowing.

Royal Train

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what efficiency gains have been achieved in the running of the royal train since 1990. [7044]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* In the five years to 1995–96 it is estimated that efficiency gains of over 10 per cent. will have been made in the running of the royal train.

Airports (Ground Collisions)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many incidents of collisions on runway aprons occurred at *(a)* Heathrow, *(b)* Gatwick, *(c)* Manchester and *(d)* Stansted airports for each year since 1985; and if he will make a statement. [7588]

Mr. Norris: At Heathrow two ground collisions between aircraft were reported in 1989, one in 1991, two in 1992 and two in 1995. No such collisions have been reported at Gatwick, Manchester or Stansted airports since 1985.

Collisions between aircraft and ground vehicles may also be reportable depending on the circumstances of the accident. The numbers of such collisions reported are as follows:

	Heathrow	*Gatwick*	*Manchester*	*Stansted*
1985	3	2	0	0
1986	4	4	1	1
1987	3	2	1	1
1988	1	4	2	1
1989	5	9	4	0
1990	1	4	0	0
1991	4	2	1	1
1992	9	2	1	0
1993	13	6	1	1
1994	11	2	4	4
1995	13	0	3	10

Ferry Crews

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of incentives granted by the Dutch Government to encourage the employment of Dutch crews in ferries operating out of the United Kingdom; and what plans he has to introduce similar incentives to promote crewing by United Kingdom crews. [7701]

Mr. Norris: The Dutch Government have notified their proposed measures to the Commission, who will assess them for conformity with the treaty of Rome and the Commission's guidelines on state aid to shipping.

We are already pursuing a package of positive measures to improve the attractiveness of the red ensign and the competitiveness of British shipping. We will take further measures were merited, but it is not the Government's policy to match subsidies to shipping offered by other member states.

Cross-channel Ferries (Inspection Reports)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make public the inspection reports relating to cross-channel ferries. [8232]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. Graham Allen, dated 10 January 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your Question about the inspection reports relating to cross-Channel ferries.

In his answer to the hon. Member for Stoke on Trent North, Ms Walley, on 27 April 1995 (Hansard volume 258 columns 614-615), Mr Norris stated the Government's belief that there is no benefit to the travelling public to be gained from the release of the results of routine inspections. The technical content of the report would not be easily comprehensible and could be open to misinterpretation.

In cases where an inspection of foreign registered roll-on roll-off ferry reveals serious deficiencies which lead to its detention, the details would be included in the list of ships detained in UK ports, which is published monthly by the Marine Safety Agency.

Marine Safety Agency (Leith)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to close the Marine Safety Agency office in Leith. [8230]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R.M. Bradley to Mr. Graham Allen, dated 10 January 1996:

I am responding to your question to the Secretary of State for Transport asking what plans the Marine Safety Agency (MSA) has to close its Leith office.

The proposal to close the MSA office in Leith has been reconsidered and I am pleased to inform you that it will now remain open and operational for the foreseeable future. The size and locations of all of the MSA's offices are, of course, regularly reviewed to ensure that resources are suitably deployed to deal with prevailing workloads.

PRIME MINISTER

Executive Agencies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Prime Minister if answers sent to hon. Members in reply to parliamentary questions by the head of executive agencies in his Department are *(a)* seen, *(b)* approved and *(c)* amended by him before they are sent; and if he will identify such letters to which amendments by him have been made in 1994–95. [7835]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service on 9 January.

Royal Household

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Prime Minister what is the present surplus in the civil list reserves; and what is the forecast surplus for each succeeding year for which an estimate has been made. [7048]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* At the end of 1995 the surplus on the civil list provision under the current 10-year settlement was £16.9 million, including interest earned. This reflects both lower inflation and cost savings by the royal household.

Under the financing mechanisms of the Civil List Act 1972, provision is fixed over the period so that the surplus accumulated in the early years can offset any shortfall in the later ones. It would be used only after discussion with the Treasury. At the end of the 10-year period any surplus will be carried forward by the Government in setting the figure for the new period.

The Government do not forecast a surplus for future years.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Prime Minister what efficiency gains have been achieved in the royal household in the past year. [7049]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* Efficiency gains in 1994 amounted to more than £1 million. Since 1991, costs have been held to more than 9 per cent. below inflation.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Prime Minister what was the expenditure on *(a)* royal garden parties and *(b)* royal functions other than garden parties; and what was the cost per person attending for each in the latest year for which figures are available. [7050]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* Total expenditure in 1995 on royal garden parties was £325,000, and nearly £230,000 on other royal functions. The full cost per person averaged below £11 for the former. The latter ranged from almost £35 for banquets to £3 for investitures, averaging around £13 together. More than 47,500 guests were involved.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Diplomatic Service

8. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action his Department is taking to improve the liaison between the diplomatic service and the British Council. [6845]

Mr. Hanley: Very close liaison already exists between the diplomatic service and the British Council both at home and overseas.

Bosnia

16. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the implementation of the Dayton agreement on Bosnia. [6853]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The Bosnia peace agreement was signed in Paris on 14 December.

Following the London peace implementation conference and the adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1031 on 15 December, implementation of the peace agreement began in earnest. The high representative, Carl Bildt, and the implementation force are now in place and implementation is proceeding as fast as the local weather and conditions permit.

26. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Russian Foreign Minister to discuss the situation in Bosnia. [6863]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary last met Mr. Kozyrev at the Bosnia peace agreement signing ceremony in Paris on 14 December. We keep in regular touch with the Russian Administration and hope that there will be an early opportunity to meet the new Russian Foreign Minister.

29. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current situation in Bosnia. [6867]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Following signature of the Bosnia peace agreement in Paris on 14 December, the situation in Bosnia has stabilised, but remains fragile. We urge all sides to fulfil in good faith the commitments entered into at Dayton.

Northern Iraq

20. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in northern Iraq. [6857]

Mr. Hanley: We welcome the continuing ceasefire between the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the Kurdish Democratic party, and support efforts to achieve a lasting agreement that has the backing of the parties in northern Iraq.

Anglo-US Foreign Policy

22. **Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to meet the US Secretary of State to discuss Anglo-US foreign policy. [6859]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has no particular plans at present but keeps in close and regular touch with the US Secretary of State and will continue to do so.

Intergovernmental Conference

23. **Sir Thomas Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made towards settling the agenda of the intergovernmental conference; and if he will make a statement. [6860]

Mr. David Davis: There is no fixed agenda for the Intergovernmental conference. A number of items are specified for examination in the Maastricht treaty. The study group report, and other European decisions and declarations have raised further issues for consideration.

Overseas Representation

24. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the representation of United Kingdom interests abroad; and if he will make a statement. [6861]

Mr. Hanley: The level and quality of the UK's overseas representation are kept constantly under review.

Kashmir

25. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Government policy in Kashmir. [6862]

Mr. Hanley: We continue to believe that the best way forward on Kashmir should involve simultaneous progress on dialogue between India and Pakistan as provided for under the 1972 Simla agreement; an improvement in human rights in Kashmir and a genuine political process there; and a clear cessation of external support for violence in Kashmir. We stand ready to offer our good offices to help resolve the dispute if both sides so wish.

28. **Mr. Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what specific steps the British Government have taken to secure the release of Paul Wells and Keith Mangan, currently held in Kashmir; what is the latest information on their state of health; what direct communications are currently taking place with their kidnappers; and if he will make a statement. [6866]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We are co-operating closely in Delhi, Srinagar and capitals with the Indian and other Governments concerned and continue to work with those who might be able to help for the safe and early release of Paul Wells and Keith Mangan.

Members of the House will know that our first priority is their safety and well-being. There is no benefit to the hostages in further speculation about their circumstances.

United Kingdom-French Relations

27. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his assessment of relations between the United Kingdom and France. [6864]

Mr. David Davis: Relations between the United Kingdom and France are excellent.

Transatlantic Co-operation

30. **Sir Roger Moate:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about steps to strengthen transatlantic co-operation. [6868]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The enhancement of the transatlantic relationship is a top foreign policy objective of the Government. The success of President Clinton's recent visit demonstrates the excellent state of relations between the US and UK.

NATO remains the indispensable cornerstone of western security, and the large north American contributions to the implementation force—IFOR—reflect the strength of the transatlantic link. The recently adopted EU/US political declaration and action plan sets out detailed undertakings for EU/US co-operation in a wide range of areas, including trade liberalisation. Complementary arrangements between the EU and Canada are also being considered.

EU Institutional Development

31. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about Her Majesty's Government's policy concerning the institutional development of the European Union. [6869]

Mr. David Davis: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) in the House earlier today.

West Bank and Gaza

32. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance his office is giving the Government of Israel in pursuing their policy of withdrawal from Palestinian territory. [6870]

Mr. Hanley: We welcome the redeployment of Israeli forces from the west bank and Gaza, a policy which we have consistently encouraged. Our aid to the Palestinians, of £83 million over three years, now with an additional £2 million which I announced yesterday in Paris, is a major contribution towards assisting Palestinian development, and promoting peace and stability in the west bank and Gaza strip.

39. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards self-rule in the west bank and Gaza. [6877]

Mr. Hanley: Israeli defence forces left Gaza and Jericho last year and, under the terms of the interim agreement, have now left all major towns of the west bank apart from Hebron.

Preparations are in hand for elections to a new Palestinian Council on 20 January.

Middle East Peace Process

33. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the middle east peace process. [6871]

Mr. Hanley: Implementation of the interim agreement has continued rapidly; the Israeli defence forces have left all major towns in the west bank apart from Hebron. Talks have also begun again between Israel and the Syrians, and we hope that the path will soon be clear to a lasting settlement in the middle east.

Land Mines

34. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects international agreement to be achieved to curtail land mine production, trade and use. [6872]

Mr. David Davis: We shall work to agree strengthened provisions on the use, as well as some restrictions on the transfer, of land mines at the conference reviewing the 1981 United Nations weaponry convention, when this resumes its work in Geneva between 15 and 19 January and between 22 April and 3 May 1996.

Thereafter, we shall take forward our proposal for a complementary land mine control programme, which seeks progressively to eliminate long-lived anti-personnel land mines, inter alia through restrictions on their production and stockpiling.

Good Governance

35. **Mr. Mark Robinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to ensure that actions following the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Auckland in relation to good governance are being properly co-ordinated among member states. [6873]

Mr. Hanley: Responsibility for co-ordinating action among member states following the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Auckland in relation to the good governance rests with the Commonwealth's ministerial action group established in Auckland for which the Commonwealth Secretary-General and his staff provide support. The Foreign Minister of Zimbabwe agreed at the group's first meeting on 20 December 1995 to chair the group. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary is a member of the group.

Rwanda

36. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Rwanda. [6874]

Mr. Hanley: The situation has improved considerably since the 1994 genocide. We continue to support the efforts of the Rwandan Government, the promotion of reconciliation and rehabilitation, and efforts to return the large numbers of refugees still outside Rwanda.

Future Large Aircraft

37. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his counterparts in Bonn and Paris concerning the collaboration of the United Kingdom, Germany and France on the future large aircraft project; and if he will make a statement. [6875]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has not had discussions on this project. However, other Ministers and officials are in regular discussion with the partner nations in the future large aircraft project to establish whether the conditions set out by the Government last December for the United Kingdom to rejoin the programme can be met.

European Security and Foreign Policy

38. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had in recent weeks in regard to the future of European security and foreign policy arrangements; and if he will make a statement. [6876]

Mr. David Davis: I have had several discussion with my colleagues in the IGC reflection group about the future of the European foreign and security policy arrangements, most recently when the group met on 3 October.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary also discussed the future of European defence arrangements, including the Western European Union contribution to the intergovernmental conference with his WEU counterparts at the WEU Ministerial Council on 14 November.

Deregulation and EU Directives

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next hopes to pay an official visit to *(a)* Athens, *(b)* Madrid and *(c)* Lisbon to discuss deregulation measures and the enforcement of EU directives. [6843]

Mr. David Davis: Neither my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary nor I has plans to visit Athens, Madrid or Lisbon to discuss deregulation measures and the enforcement of EU directives. My colleague the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster visited Madrid for this purpose in October and intends to meet Ministers from Athens and Lisbon early in 1996.

British Nationals (Assistance)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many United Kingdom citizens required financial assistance from Foreign Office representatives last year; and how much of the money loaned has been recovered. [6854]

Mr. Hanley: In 1994 1,041 British nationals were given financial assistance totalling £75,635. So far, 62 per cent. has been recovered.

Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans the Commonwealth ministerial action group has to take evidence in public. [7605]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* The Commonwealth ministerial action group agreed on 20 December 1995 to receive written submissions and to review its *modus operandi* wherever necessary but did not decide to take evidence in public.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the Commonwealth ministerial action group will be funded. [7607]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* The Commonwealth Secretariat will provide administrative support for meetings of the group. Travel costs for members of the group will be met by their respective Governments.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions the Commonwealth ministerial action group is expected to meet over the next two years; and where the meetings will be held. [7604]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* The group has no set meeting schedule and agreed at its meeting in London on 20 December 1995, to meet "as and when necessary". It agreed to hold a further meeting in London in April and to send a five-member mission to

Nigeria to pursue "dialogue with the Nigerian Government". A date for this mission has not yet been agreed.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the reports of the Commonwealth ministerial action group to the Heads of Government will be published. [7606]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* The group published a "Concluding Statement" after its first meeting on 20 December 1995, a copy of which has been placed in the Libraries of the House. The group's mandate is to report to Commonwealth Heads of Government who will exercise ultimate responsibility for deciding whether the group's reports should be published.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Public Libraries (Internet)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many public libraries in the United Kingdom are connected to the Internet. [8072]

Mr. Sproat: According to a recent survey by the Library and Information Commission, 142 library service points in the United Kingdom, 3 per cent. of the total, have at least one Internet connection, while 0.7 per cent. of service points provide Internet access for the public.

Queen Adelaide Coronation Crown

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage where the coronation crown of Queen Adelaide is to be kept for the nation. [8125]

Mr. Sproat: I refer to the reply I gave to the hon. Member on 18 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *855*. The coronation crown of Queen Adelaide has not yet been presented to the nation. The manner of the presentation and to whom are matters for HRH Prince Jefri Bolkiah of Brunei.

Sports and Arts Councils

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will detail *(a)* the amount allocated to each of the United Kingdom's sports and arts councils from the national lottery and the amount of that allocation each body has offered, to date, to applicants, *(b)* the number of recipients in each sector and *(c)* the number and amount of applications lodged but not yet fully processed; and what assessment she has made of the performance of the distributing bodies and their present arrangements. [6690]

Mr. Sproat: It is too early to assess the performance of the distributing bodies in managing lottery funds.

The information on awards requested by the hon. Member is as follows:

	Amount allocated £ million	*Value of awards made £ million*	*Number of awards made*	*Value of applications in progress £ million*	*Number of applications in progress*
Sports					
The Sports Council	248.5	144.5	880	504.5	994
The Scottish Sports Council	26.5	16.4	146	14.1	77
The Sports Council for Wales	14.9	9.8	111	39.9	88
The Sports Council for Northern Ireland	8.3	7.0	101	9.0	52
Sports Total	298.2	177.7	1,238	567.5	1,211
Arts					
The Arts Council of England	248.5	207.8	398	469.8	575
The Scottish Arts Council	26.5	14.4	105	21.7	86
The Arts Council of Wales	14.9	9.1	126	23.1	204
The Arts Council of Northern Ireland	8.3	4.3	49	10.0	80
Arts Total	298.2	235.6	678	524.6	945
Arts and Sports Total	596.4	413.3	1,916	1,092.1	2,156

Library Authorities

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the spending per head of population of each library authority in England and Wales in each of the last five years. [8012]

Mr. Sproat: Such information is contained in the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's "Public Library Statistics", copies of which are held in the House Library. Actual figures for 1995–96 are expected to be published later this month, but estimates are already available for 1996–97.

Mobile Phones

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many mobile telephones have been supplied to her Department in each of the last eight years, and in each of those years how many different suppliers were involved. [8033]

Mr. Sproat: The Department of National Heritage was established on 13 April 1992 and figures can be provided only from that date. The number of mobile phones provided to the Department since then is as follows:

	Number of mobile phones	*Number of suppliers*
1993–94	7	2
1994–95	20	3
1995–96	4	2

Director General of Oflot

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage on which date her Department first became aware of the flights taken by the Director General of Oflot; who was the most senior person to be aware of the flights prior to 11 December; for what reasons no member of her Department notified *(a)* the National Audit Office and *(b)* the Committee of Public Accounts prior to 11 December; in what circumstances her Department became aware of the flights; and when, thereafter, the first meeting took place between the director general and departmental officials or Ministers. [8118]

Mrs. Bottomley *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* The brief prepared by the Office of the National Lottery for the director general's appearance before the Committee of Public Accounts on 11 December stated that the GTech corporate jet was used on occasions when it made operational sense to do so. My Department was first aware of this when the grade 3 head of arts, sports and lottery group read this brief on 4 December 1995. Full reports on the visits and travel arrangements were on Oflot's files and thus open to inspection by the National Audit Office from November 1994. It was for the director general as accounting officer, rather than for my officials, to answer any questions raised by the Committee about these matters.

The subsequent meetings at which the subject was discussed were on 12 December at one of the director general's regular informal liaison meetings with my officials; on 15 December, when the director general submitted to my Department his draft report to me; and on 18 and 19 December, when first the permanent secretary, and then I, discussed the report with the director general.

Royal Household Properties

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the properties currently lying vacant in the royal household and indicating in each case *(a)* its estimated value *(b)* whether it is in habitable condition and *(c)* its estimated maximum occupancy level. [7052]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* It is the royal household's policy not to leave properties vacant unless they require refurbishment between occupations. At any one time, 15 to 20 properties used for providing self-contained residential accommodation are likely to be undergoing refurbishment. There is currently one property, whose ownership is vested in my Department, which is currently vacant and will be placed on the market. The property is a three-bedroom terrace house, in a habitable condition, with an estimated value of £100,000.

Royal Palaces

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what funding was provided by her Department for the management of property services for occupied palaces in the last year for which figures are available. [7046]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* The grant-in-aid from my Department in 1994–95 was £20.541 million.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Veterinary Medicines

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the 1994 report of the appraisal panel for human suspected adverse reactions to veterinary medicines will be published. [9027]

Mrs. Browning: I am pleased to announce that this report has been published. It sets out the conclusions of the appraisal panel drawn from the 144 human suspected adverse reaction reports which it considered during 1994. Of these, 99 related to organophosphorus sheep dips and 45 to other veterinary medicines, including mineral oil based vaccines, flea collars and pour-on products for dogs and cats. They were mainly reports received since December 1990, 20 per cent. of which were regarded as historical reports where the exposure and symptoms had occurred more than a year before the reports were received.

In many cases, the panel had inadequate information on which to make its assessment and its conclusions are based on a balance of evidence. They should not be considered to be a definitive clinical diagnosis. Of the 99 reports related to OP sheep dips, one acute reaction was assessed as category 1—clinical signs and symptoms typical of exposure to OP sheep dips combined with corroborating medical evidence—the first time the panel has classified a case in this category. The veterinary products committee advised, when considering the report, that such a conclusion is not unexpected, since it is known that exposure to organophosphates can result in acute symptoms. It is for this reason that advice aimed at minimising operator exposure is provided on product labels and in the "Sheep dipping" booklet.

Copies of the report have been placed in the Library of the House.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Dr. Wright: To ask the minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many meetings have been held by the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee since its inception; what research it has commissioned; what reports it has made; and which of its papers have been *(a)* published and *(b)* not published. [7809]

Mrs. Browning: The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee has met on 29 occasions since its inception in 1990. Its responsibilities include advising MAFF and the Department of Health on research priorities, but it does not commission research itself. It has published two reports, the most recent in February 1995. A copy is available in the Library of the House. Papers for the committee are internal to the committee and are not generally published.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many reports he has received from farmers alleging that when they have reported BSE symptoms to his Department's veterinary officers, they have not received advice as to the action they should take. [7988]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* We are not aware of any allegations. An advisory leaflet was sent to all registered cattle owners in 1990. The leaflet gives details of the action to be taken by farmers who suspect that an animal may be affected with BSE, and the action which will be taken by the Ministry when a suspect is notified.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment his Department has made of the fatal toxicity levels of BSE in respect of *(a)* animals and *(b)* humans. [8096]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* It is not possible to quantify infectivity in any tissue in absolute terms because the agent itself has not been characterised, and it cannot be cultured or assayed in vitro. Quantification by bioassay provides an assessment of the amount of infectivity present in the source tissue, but it can be expressed only in relative terms specific to the experimental animal model used and the route of challenge. Quantification of the minimum amount of infective cattle brain needed to produce clinical disease in the challenged animal species has been carried out for mice, and is currently in progress in cattle in separate experiments by oral and intracerebral routes. Both experiments are incomplete and cannot yet be interpreted. No such assessment is possible for humans without deliberately exposing humans to BSE agent.

NORTHERN IRELAND

IRA

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what communications he, his Ministers or his officials have had with the IRA or members of the IRA since 1 September 1994; on what dates; which individuals were involved; what was the medium used; and what were the subjects dealt with. [7361]

Mr. Ancram: Ministers and officials have neither had nor sought any contacts with representatives of the IRA over this period.

Bryansburn Stream

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will estimate the cost and length of culverting of the Bryansburn stream and its tributary in the Kilcoolley estate in Bangor. [7383]

Mr. Ancram: Culverting of the open sections of the Bryansburn stream and its tributary would extend over some 350 m. Without a full engineering survey of the watercourses and the ground conditions, it is not possible to provide an accurate costing. A preliminary estimate of costs is in the range of £300 to £350 per metre, excluding design, supervision and overhead costs. The total cost would be at minimum £110,000.

Fair Employment Commission

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what efforts have been made by the Fair Employment Commission to provide more accurate monitoring returns in respect of *(a)* Belfast City Hospital HSS trust, *(b)* Belfast education and library board, *(c)* British Broadcasting Corporation, *(d)* Craigavon area hospital group trust, *(e)* Department of Finance and Personnel, Northern Ireland civil service, *(f)* Eastern health and social services board, *(g)* Green Park Healthcare trust, *(h)* North Eastern education and library board, *(i)* Northern health and social services board, *(j)* Office of Public Service and Science, *(k)* Royal Group of Hospitals HSS trust, *(l)* South Eastern education and library board, *(m)* Southern health and social services board, *(n)* Ulster, North Down and Ards Hospitals trust and *(o)* Western health and social services board. [7748]

Mr. Ancram: I have been advised by the FEC that it has no evidence that the named bodies are submitting inaccurate monitoring returns. In common with all registered concerns, these bodies are required to submit annual monitoring returns to the FEC, in accordance with the provisions of the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989 and the Fair Employment (Monitoring) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1989.

Unemployment

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the level of unemployment in each Northern Ireland parliamentary constituency *(a)* in July 1990, *(b)* in July 1995 and *(c)* at the latest available date. [8006]

Mr. Ancram: Information on the level of unemployment each Northern Ireland parliamentary constituency at these dates can be obtained from the NOMIS database, which can be accessed by the House of Commons Library.

Inward Investment

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much inward investment has come to *(a)* Belfast, East and *(b)* other Northern Ireland constituencies in the last 10 years. [8058]

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows:

Inward investment projects secured by the Industrial Development Board, 1985–86 to 1994–95

	Belfast East			Other constituencies		
	Projects	*Jobs*	*Investment (£ million)*	*Projects*	*Jobs*	*Investment (£ million)*
1985–86	—	—	—	6	224	9.3
1986–87	—	—	—	7	415	24.9
1987–88	1	15	0.2	10	835	21.3
1988–89	—	—	—	7	1,856	105.8
1989–90	—	—	—	10	1,577	114.8
1990–91	—	—	—	9	258	9.9
1991–92	—	—	—	3	80	1.6
1992–93	1	150	7.5	9	1,695	160.0
1993–94	1	70	5.8	12	2,239	253.3
1994–95	—	—	—	10	1,969	130.3

During the period 1985–86 to 1994–95 14 additional projects promising 1,903 jobs were secured without selective financial assistance. Although none of these projects located in the Belfast East constituency, 1,220 of the promised jobs were in projects located in Belfast city centre.

In addition to new inward investment projects a number of overseas-owned companies already located in Belfast, East benefited from further investment, towards which Government made a substantial contribution.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the locations of the inward investment projects promoted by the Industrial Development Board between 1 April and 30 November; and what was the cost involved in respect of each project. [7344]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 20 December 1995]:* The inward investment projects secured by the Industrial Development Board between 1 April and 30 November 1995 are set out. The figures do not include one investment for which a formal announcement has still to be agreed with the company.

Inward investment projects secured: 1 April to 30 November 1995

Company	*Location*	*Assistance (£ million)*
BCO Technologies	Belfast West	7.3
Montupet	Dunmurry	57.0
Stream	Londonderry	5.4
Plastofilm Inc	Enniskillen	0.9
Burnside Engineering	Enniskillen	1.0
Aldiscon	Belfast North	0.7

Economic, Social and Environmental Indicators

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what specific *(a)* economic, *(b)* social and *(c)* environmental indicators have been developed for (1) Belfast, East and (2) each of the other Belfast parliamentary constituencies. [8007]

Mr. Ancram: No formal economic, social or environmental indicators have been specifically developed for parliamentary constituencies. However, various statistical series, including unemployment and employment, are available at a parliamentary constituency level.

Industrial Development Board

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many jobs were created by the Industrial Development Board from 15 April 1994 to 31 March 1995 and from 1 April 1995 to 30 November 1995; how many of those were the result of inward investment contracts; and what are the locations of these jobs. [7794]

Mr. Ancram: Information on job creations is not available in the manner requested or by location. However, details of jobs promoted by the Industrial Development Board in 1994–95 and for 1 April 1995 to 30 November 1995 are available by district council area and are set out in the table. The Industrial Development Board's own research shows that companies create approximately two thirds of all promoted jobs over a period of three to five years after acceptance of the Industrial Development Board's offer of assistance.

Jobs promoted by the Industrial Development Board 1994–95 and 1 April to 30 November 1995

	1994–95		*1 April 1995 to 30 November 1995*	
District council area	*Total jobs promoted*	*Inward investment jobs included in total jobs*	*Total jobs provided*	*Inward investment jobs included in total jobs*
Antrim	1,156	579	—	—
Ards	14	—	—	—
Armagh	—	—	—	—
Ballymena	—	—	—	—
Ballymoney	—	—	—	—
Banbridge	—	—	17	—
Belfast	218	67	243	190
Carrickfergus	315	255	—	—
Castlereagh	—	—	—	—
Coleraine	60	60	—	—
Cookstown	35	—	—	—
Craigavon	977	509	210	—
Derry	541	481	618	618
Down	—	—	41	41
Dungannon	124	—	109	—
Fermanagh	191	—	118	118
Larne	—	—	—	—
Limavady	—	—	—	—
Lisburn	—	—	1,358	1,358
Magherafelt	—	—	10	—
Moyle	—	—	—	—
Newry and Mourne	18	18	39	—
Newtownabbey	306	—	—	—

Jobs promoted by the Industrial Development Board 1994–95 and 1 April to 30 November 1995

District council area	1994–95 Total jobs promoted	1994–95 Inward investment jobs included in total jobs	1 April 1995 to 30 November 1995 Total jobs provided	1 April 1995 to 30 November 1995 Inward investment jobs included in total jobs
North Down	85	—	20	—
Omagh	55	—	18	—
Strabane	—	—	—	-
Total	4,095	1,969	2,801	2,325

Live Animal Transport

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received from *(a)* individual farmers and *(b)* farming organisations about the practical consequences of implementing EC directive 95/29 on livestock transport, in sparsely populated areas. [8197]

Mr. Ancram: The Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland advised interested organisations in August 1995 of the provisions of directive 95/29. No representations were made at that stage. A formal consultation paper containing proposals for implementing the directive in Northern Ireland has recently been issued to interested organisations and comments sought by 2 February 1996. To date, no comments have been received.

Director of Research and Development, DHSS

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when it is intended to fill the post of director of research and development in the Department of Health and Social Services. [8134]

Sir John Wheeler: The intention is that a post of director of research and development for the health and personal social services will be filled during 1996.

Clinical Research Awards

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what factors underlay the non-award of clinical research awards in the current year. [8135]

Sir John Wheeler: In the current financial year, 16 clinical research awards were made for research fellowships.

In the next financial year, 1996–97, there will be continuing support for clinical research fellowships, and support for on-going PhD studentships.

Children's Specialties

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures have been taken to strengthen regional children's specialties. [8136]

Sir John Wheeler: The final stage of a major programme of redevelopment, costing about £10 million, is currently underway at the Royal Belfast hospital for sick children. This will include new operating theatres, an intensive care unit, an out-patients department and an accident and emergency department. The scheme is due for completion in 1998 and meanwhile the Government are satisfied with the present range and quality of regional medical services for children in Northern Ireland.

Nurses

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many pre-registration nursing and midwifery students commenced training as initial entrants by means of *(a)* salaried students places *(b)* Project 2000 and *(c)* undergraduate study for each of the last five years. [8349]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is as follows:

Project 2000

Year	Number of students who commenced training
1994–95	462
1993–94	533
1992–93	687
1991–92	684
1990–91	389

Undergraduate students

Year	Number of degree students who commenced training
1994–95	32
1993–94	34
1992–93	32
1991–92	32
1990—91	27

The number for "salaried student places" is not held centrally.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the number of nurses working in *(a)* private nursing homes, *(b)* private hospitals, *(c)* local authorities, *(d)* private residential homes, *(e)* the armed forces, *(f)* the prison service, *(g)* the occupational health service, *(h)* private industry, *(i)* self-employment and *(j)* any other categories; and if he will express the figures in terms of (i) total numbers and (ii) whole-time equivalents for each of the last five years. [8331]

Sir John Wheeler: The numbers of nurses working in the Northern Ireland Prison Service are as follows:

	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
Number	3	3	5	12
WTE	3	3	5	12

This relates only to DHSS nurses and does not include prison officers who hold a nursing qualification.

The information relating to the other parts of the question is not centrally available.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many pre-registration nursing and midwifery students who commenced training as initial entrants by means of *(a)* salaried student places, *(b)* Project 2000 and *(c)* undergraduate study, (i) qualified and (ii) registered with the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for each of the last five years; [8332]

(2) how many pre-registration nursing and midwifery students who commenced training as initial entrants by means of *(a)* salaried student places, *(b)* Project 2000 and *(c)* undergraduate study, gave up their courses for each year of training for each of the last five years; [8337]

(3) how many pre-registration nursing and midwifery students who commenced training as initial entrants by means of *(a)* salaried student places, *(b)* Project 2000 and *(c)* undergraduate study, gave up their training in (i) the first year, (ii) the second year and (iii) the third year for each of the last five years. [8338]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is not held centrally.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland by what means he assesses the demand for conversion courses for second level registered nurses. [8334]

Sir John Wheeler: The demand for conversion courses for second level registered nurses is estimated by local employers in consultation with the colleges of nursing.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how he intends to estimate demand for nurses from the non-NHS sector; and how this information will be used to regulate the supply of nursing students. [8336]

Sir John Wheeler: The estimated demand for nurses from the non-NHS sector is regularly monitored through meetings between the working paper 9 group and the major providers of private care in the Province and through the "tracking system" operated by the national board which gives an estimate of the area of employment of new qualifiers.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support Agency

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the letter from the Data Protection Registrar concerning powers of the Child Support Agency to require the disclosure of personal data. [5302]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The letter referred to by the Data Protection Registrar in her annual report, together with my response, has been placed in the Library.

Ms. Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give a month by month breakdown of lost incoming calls recorded by the Child Support Agency's telephone system since April 1993. [4174]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 9 January 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency telephone system.

The information you have requested is not available from April 1993. Figures became available from September 1994. The attached table shows a month by month breakdown from September 1994 until October 1995.

Like any other business where a great deal of contact with clients is by telephone, it is worth pointing out that where calls are unsuccessful for whatever reason, be it the client choosing to ring at another time or experiencing difficulty in connection, there will almost certainly be future contact which will be successful.

I hope this is helpful.

Month	*Calls to CSACs lost*	*Calls to NEL lost*	*Total*
September 1994	47,760	779	48,539
October 1994	38,567	423	38,990
November 1994	36,434	531	36,965
December 1994	26,780	803	27,583
January 1995	51,083	5,551	56,634
February 1995	22,573	3,146	25,719
March 1995	18,477	4,211	22,688
April 1995	7,007	9,995	17,002
May 1995	4,744	833	5,577
June 1995	3,740	381	4,121
July 1995	4,212	533	4,745
August 1995	5,289	470	5,759
September 1995	4,969	1,091	6,060
October 1995	4,156	942	5,098
	275,791	29,689	305,480

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the Child Support Agency uses calling line identification on incoming telephone calls. [6243]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. George Walden, dated 9 January 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency's use of calling line identification.

Calling line identification is a facility provided by British Telecom to all users, and is used by the Child Support Agency Centres to display incoming telephone numbers. The facility was activated by the Agency as a security aid to identify the source of abusive calls and bomb threats.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much has been collected by the Child Support Agency, each year, since its inception; what the running costs of the agency have been for each of these years; and how much has been passed on as a direct net financial gain to the parent with care. [6330]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Alan Simpson, dated 9 January 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about maintenance collected by the Child Support Agency.

The table attached shows the amounts of maintenance collected, and the proportion of maintenance paid to parents with care for each of the first two years of Child Support Agency operations and for the first seven months of the current year.

In addition, the Agency was involved in arranging maintenance for direct payment by the absent parent to the parent with care, amounting to an estimated £111 million during 1994–95. £70.67 million has been arranged between April and October 1995. Comparable figures are not available for 1993–94.

A proportion of the maintenance paid to parents with care will have offset benefit paid, but it is not possible to say how much. However, all maintenance paid to parents with care represents a financial benefit for the parent with care providing a firm basis for them to seek employment and claim Family Credit.

From launch on 5 April 1993, the Agency's net cost of operations during 1993–94 was £139 million as published in the annual accounts on 28 November 1994. The net cost of operations during 1994–95 was £192 million as published in the annual accounts on 18 July 1995. Expenditure statements in both annual reports are prepared on an accruals basis. The total Agency running costs budget for 1995–96 is £196.9 million.

I hope this is helpful.

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96 to October*
Maintenance collected (£ million)	13.10	76.40	72.64
Maintenance collected and paid to parent with care (£ million)	2.99	27.89	29.97
Proportion of maintenance collected and paid to parent with care.	22.83 per cent.	36.51 per cent.	41.26 per cent.

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the average weekly maintenance payment via the Child Support Agency collection service for cases which are *(a)* fully compliant and *(b)* partially compliant, indicating separately type A interim assessments and full maintenance assessments. [6241]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. George Walden, dated 9 January 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about maintenance payments to the Child Support Agency.

You asked about the weekly maintenance in cases which are fully and partially paid. Whilst specific information on these cases is not available, the average amount of maintenance assessment in cases with an interim assessment is £95.29 and with a full maintenance assessment, when the absent parent has earned income, the figure is £39.69. The breakdown of cases is shown on the attached table.

I hope this is helpful.

Cases using the CSA collection service

	Number of cases involving type A interim maintenance assessments	*Number of cases involving full maintenance assessments*
Fully paid[1]	6,826	42,280
Partially paid[2]	16,521	74,601
Not paid	58,961	12,473
Total	82,308	129,354

[1] Full compliance—no payments outstanding.
[2] Partial compliance—at least one payment received in the last thirteen weeks.

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much is owing to the Child Support Agency collection service attributable *(a)* to type a interim maintenance assessments and *(b)* to full maintenance assessments, broken down by month from April 1994 until the most recent data available. [6242]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. George Walden, dated 9 January 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about how much is owing to the Child Support Agency collection service.

At the end of October 1995, the total outstanding debt amounted to £766 million. It is estimated that the proportion of this debt which is attributable to interim maintenance assessments (IMAs) is 65 per cent. (approximately £498 million), and 35 per cent. (approximately £268 million) is attributable to full maintenance assessments (FMAs). It is not possible to give a monthly breakdown from April 1994 as this information only became available from September 1995.

It is not possible to further break down the £498 million debt by category of IMA, but the vast majority of this debt can be attributed to category A IMAs. This is because the other types of IMAs (Category B, C and D) are used in circumstances where the absent parent is likely to be cooperating with the Agency.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what checks are made by the Child Support Agency to ensure that it has correctly identified an absent parent before it contacts that parent. [7227]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Peter Thurnham, dated 9 January 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about checks made by the Child Support Agency prior to contacting an absent parent (AP).

Information about absent parents is provided to the Agency in the first instance by the parent with care (PWC) on a maintenance application form. The form requests details of the name, sex, date of birth, National Insurance number, and the address of the AP.

Where the PWC has provided a current address for the AP, and paternity is not an issue, the Agency issues a maintenance enquiry form by post to the AP. It is made clear to a person receiving a maintenance enquiry form from the Agency that the form has been issued on information provided to the Agency. The recipient is invited to contact the Agency for advice including those who believe they have been incorrectly identified.

Where the PWC is unable to provide a current address, the Agency takes action to trace the AP on the information provided by the PWC. The first step in this action is to use the Departmental

Central Index (DCI) to find a match with the information that has been provided by the PWC. Where the information provided produces a single positive match with DCI, a maintenance enquiry form is issued to the address held. Where more than one possible match is found, a Child Support Officer (CS0) may then return to the PWC for any other information that can be given to enable a positive match to be made. If more information is received which allows a positive match to be made, a maintenance enquiry form is issued.

Where a positive match still cannot be made, the CSO will take specialist trace action to try to find the AP. The action taken will depend on the amount of information provided by the PWC, and may take the form of contacting other Government departments, for example, the Inland Revenue. Once again, a maintenance enquiry form is only issued when the CSO is satisfied that a positive match has been made.

Where more than one possible match exists and all attempts have failed to produce a positive match, the CSO will consider referring the case for a visit to be made to establish the identity of the AP. The officer who conducts such a visit would have all the available information on the AP, including description details provided by the PWC and a photograph if possible so that mistaken identity is avoided. In every case, at every stage, checks are made to ensure that the correct person has been identified before contact is made with the absent parent.

As with any human process mistakes can occur despite all our security measures, but they are very rare. Available data shows that out of 852,763 maintenance enquiry forms issued from April 1993 (the inception of the Agency), to October 1995, 222 of them (0.026 per cent) were issued to someone who in fact had no child maintenance liability in the case concerned. Of this relatively small number, by no means all were because the Agency acted incorrectly (PWCs sometimes give wrong information), but wherever our strict procedures are breached, disciplinary action is taken against any member os staff who is culpable.

I hope this is helpful.

Income Support

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* 16 and 17-year-olds and *(b)* 18 to 24-year-olds in each standard region currently claim (i) income support, (ii) income support with penalty deductions and (iii) bridging allowance do not receive any income from work, training or benefits; if he will distinguish between economically active and economically inactive claimants; and if he will provide this information for the summer quarter from 1992 to 1995. [4316]

Mr. Roger Evans: The available information is in the tables. The income support figures requested are not available for summer 1992 or summer 1995; figures for May 1992 and February 1995, the latest figures are given instead.

The regional breakdown of bridging allowance recipients is not currently available.

The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the tables.

Income support claimants by GSS region: May 1992–February 1995

Income support recipients May 1992

	All with Income Support						
		16–17			*18–24*		
Region	*All cases*	*Economically active*	*Not economically active*	*All cases*	*Economically active*	*Not economically active*	*Of which 18–24 year with VU reduction*
South East (ex London)	4,000	1,000	3,000	119,000	77,000	42,000	3,000
London (inner and outer)	4,000	1,000	3,000	135,000	85,000	50,000	2,000
North	1,000	—	1,000	84,000	37,000	27,000	1,000
Wales	2,000	—	2,000	63,000	28,000	25,000	—
Scotland	4,000	2,000	2,000	96,000	53,000	42,000	1,000
Yorkshire and Humberside	4,000	1,000	3,000	90,000	52,000	38,000	1,000
East Midlands	3,000	1,000	2,000	63,000	36,000	27,000	2,000
East Anglia	1,000	—	1,000	23,000	15,000	8,000	1,000
South-West	3,000	1,000	2,000	56,000	38,000	19,000	2,000
West Midlands	3,000	1,000	2,000	94,000	56,000	38,000	2,000
North-West	3,000	1,000	2,000	135,000	75,000	80,000	2,000
Great Britain	30,000	8,000	22,000	925,000	549,000	378,000	16,000

Income support claimants by GSS Region: May 1992–February 1995

Income support recipients August 1993

	All with income support						
		16-17			*18–24*		
Region	*All cases*	*All economically active*	*Not economically active*	*All cases*	*Economically active*	*Not economically active*	*Of which 18–24 with VU reduction*[1]
South East (ex London)	5,000	2,000	3,000	153,000	107,000	46,000	—
London (inner and outer)	4,000	2,000	2,000	167,000	112,000	55,000	—
North	3,000	1,000	2,000	70,000	40,000	30,000	—
Wales	2,000	1,000	2,000	61,000	36,000	25,000	—
Scotland	5,000	2,000	3,000	101,000	59,000	42,000	—

Income support claimants by GSS Region: May 1992–February 1995

Income support recipients August 1993

	All with income support						
		16-17			18–24		
Region	*All cases*	*All economically active*	*Not economically active*	*All cases*	*Economically active*	*Not economically active*	*Of which 18–24 with VU reduction*[1]
Yorkshire and Humberside	4,000	1,000	2,000	105,000	64,000	41,000	—
East Midlands	2,000	1,000	2,000	70,000	46,000	24,000	—
East Anglia	1,000	1,000	1,000	29,000	19,000	10,000	—
South west	2,000	1,000	2,000	70,000	49,000	22,000	—
West midlands	3,000	1,000	2,000	112,000	72,000	40,000	—
North west	4,000	1,000	3,000	151,000	90,000	61,000	—
Great Britain	36,000	12,000	23,000	1,088,000	693,000	396,000	10,000

Income support claimants by GSS region: May 1992–February 1995

Income support recipients August 1994

	All with income support						
		16–17			18–24		
Region	*All cases*	*Economically active*	*Not economically active*	*All cases*	*Economically active*	*Not economically active*	*Of which 18-24 with VU reduction*
South East (ex London)	5,000	2,000	3,000	129,000	85,000	44,000	4,000
London (inner and outer)	3,000	1,000	2,000	147,000	95,000	52,000	2,000
North	2,000	—	1,000	67,000	39,000	27,000	1,000
Wales	2,000	—	1,000	88,000	33,000	25,000	1,000
Scotland	5,000	1,000	3,000	97,000	58,000	39,000	2,000
Yorkshire and Humberside	4,000	1,000	3,000	96,000	58,000	38,000	2,000
East Midlands	2,000	—	2,000	88,000	42,000	24,000	2,000
East Anglia	1,000	—	1,000	27,000	16,000	10,000	1,000
South West	3,000	1,000	2,000	62,000	41,000	21,000	2,000
West Midlands	3,000	—	3,000	99,000	63,000	36,000	2,000
North West	4,000	1,000	3,000	136,000	79,000	57,000	2,000
Great Britain	31,000	7,000	24,000	983,000	808,000	375,000	21,000

Income support claimants by GSS region: May 1992–February 1995

Income support recipients February 1995

	All with Income Support						
		16–17			18–24		
Region	*All cases*	*Economically active*	*Not economically active*	*All cases*	*Economically active*	*Not economically active*	*Of which 18–24 with VU reduction*
Great Britain	41,000	15,000	27,000	916,000	635,000	361,000	19,000

Notes:

[1] 1 per cent. data used.

1. All figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. "—" denotes nil or negligible.
3. Government Standard Statistical Regions have been used. No breakdown by GSS region is available for February 1995.
4. Economically active has been defined as those persons in the unemployed statistical groups "E/EF".
5. Claimants with a deduction for voluntary unemployment are also included in the all cases total. There are no 16 and 17 year olds with this deduction.
6. Figures for Summer 1992 + 1995 are not available. Figures for May 1992 + February 1995 are given instead.
7. 16 and 17 years olds have been processed on ISCS since January 1995 and this had up to an estimated six thousand cases due to improved data collection methods.
8. VU = Voluntary Unemployment Deduction.

Sources:

Income Support Statistics Annual Enquiry May 1992.

Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiries August 1993 and August 1994.

Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry February 1995.

Young people receiving bridging allowance

Year of registration (for period June to September)	*Number of young people registered*
1992	40,004
1993	28,132
1994	20,548
1995	18,258

Note:
1. The figures will include some young people of 18 and over. Their numbers are very small and the Employment Service does not have a record of the figure.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many new claims for income support have been made by single mothers in each year since the introduction of the Child Support Bill; and if he will make a statement. [7228]

Mr. Evans: The available information is set out in the table:

Year	*Number of new awards*
1992–93	283,000
1993–94	271,000
1994–95	262,000

Notes:
1. Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. The years represented above are for the periods commencing May to February.
3. The number of awards has been estimated by looking at new lone parent family cases which appear in each of the four quarterly inquiries of each yearly period. However, no account has been taken of claims which start and end between inquiry dates.
4. Estimates cannot be made prior to May 1992 as the data are not available in the form required.

Benefits Agency Medical Service

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average period of general practice experience of a Benefits Agency medical service doctor in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* England. [6260]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Ron Davis, dated 9 January 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about what is the average period of General Practice experience of a Benefits Agency Medical Service (BAMS) Doctor in (a) the United Kingdom, (b) Wales and (c) England.

All BAMS Doctors should have at least five years experience in General Practice, Occupational Medicine, Rehabilitation Medicine or similar related disciplines, when recruited. In some cases, however, the Benefits Agency will accept a minimum of three years for fee paid Doctors who have been working in a relevant specialist field.

Precise details of the number of years experience obtained in General Practice are not kept, but it is a prerequisite that BAMS Doctors must be experienced medical practitioners who have, since full registration, consolidated their clinical skills.

I hope you find my reply helpful.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the maximum period of time which can elapse between a doctor's experience of general practice and employment by the Benefits Agency medical services; [6261]

(2) what is the minimum experience of general practice required for a Benefits Agency medical service doctor. [6262]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Benefits Agency medical services is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Ron Davies, dated 9 January 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about what is the maximum period of time which can elapse between a Doctor's experience of General Practice and employment by the Benefits Agency Medical Service (BAMS) and what is the minimum experience of General Practice required for a BAMS doctor.

There is no specific period of time which can elapse between a Doctor's experience of General Practice and employment by the BAMS. Each case is, however, considered on its merits.

Doctors, employed on a permanent basis by BAMS, are required to have at least five years experience in General Practice. The BAMS prefer fee paid Doctors to have five years experience but will, in some cases, for example, if a fee paid Doctor has been working in a relevant specialist field, accept a minimum of three years experience.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what percentage of doctors who work for the Benefits Agency medical service on a part-time basis are currently in clinical practice in *(a)* the United kingdom, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* England; [6256]

(2) what percentage of current Benefits Agency medical service doctors are specialists in the field of mental health. [6258]

Mr. Roger Evans: Information is available only at disproportionate cost.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Sheerman : To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many cold weather payments have been made to the elderly or infirm in 1995. [7230]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested.

The social fund cold weather payment scheme triggered 13 times at five weather stations between January and March 1995. Approximately 11,000 payments worth £77,000 were made. So far this winter, the scheme has triggered 76 times at 47 stations throughout the country. As a result, nearly 3.8 million payments totalling almost £32 million have been made.

Pensioners

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on targeting help towards particularly needy pensioner groups. [8081]

Mr. Heald: We are pledged to maintaining the value of the basic state pension whilst focusing additional resources on those on a low income. Extra help, worth

around £1.2 billion a year at current rates, has been made available to this group through the income-related benefits.

Appeals

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to accelerate the appeals procedure arrangements for which his Department is responsible. [8078]

Mr. Roger Evans: In conjunction with the independent tribunal service, the Department is continually looking for ways to improve the clearance times on appeals. This year, more appeals have been heard than at this time last year. Measures currently planned to improve the position still further include the introduction of a system of individual review for all cases over six months old and the reorganisation of administrative support to the tribunals.

Chronic Industrial Disease

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many people were estimated to suffer from chronic industrial disease in each standard region of England, in England as a whole, and for the United kingdom, for each of the last available three years; and if he will make a statement; [8085]

(2) how many people were estimated to suffer from a chronic industrial disease in each health authority and for Wales as a whole in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [8084]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Industrial injuries disablement benefit is paid on a no-fault, non-contributory basis to employed earners who suffer loss of faculty, normally of 14 per cent. or more, as a result of certain prescribed diseases. The table gives the number of industrial injuries disablement benefit assessments in payment in each of the three years in Great Britain, Wales, England and the English regions. I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for information in respect of Northern Ireland.

Industrial injuries disablement benefit—number of assessments in payment in respect of prescribed diseases

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Great Britain	37,404	37,671	42,914
Wales	6,236	6,058	6,821
England	27,452	27,838	31,727
English Regions			
Northern	5,511	5,486	6,360
Yorkshire and Humberside	5,500	5,447	6,355
East Midlands	2,190	2,271	3,162
East Anglia	456	589	572
South East	2,623	2,807	3,329
South Western	1,223	1,222	1,136
West Midlands	4,432	4,440	4,907
North Western	5,517	5,576	5,905

Notes:

1. Figures do not always sum due to calculation of allowance for late returns.
2. Figures relate to pension assessments in payment and not persons.

Source:

Based on 10 per cent. sample with an allowance for late returns.

Statutory Sick Pay

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what further plans he has for lifting the burden from employers of operating the statutory sick pay scheme. [8624]

Mr. Lilley: I am issuing a consultation paper today which seeks views on a proposal which would grant employers exemption from operating the rules of the statutory sick pay scheme if they pay wages or occupational sick pay at or above the SSP rate. It would allow greater flexibility to employers and cut back on administration. The proposed arrangement would particularly benefit employers with occupational sick pay schemes by removing the need to keep two sets of records. It would also have the advantage of including smaller employers who do not have a formal occupational sick pay scheme but who offer more generous pay when employees are off sick. Employees' underlying entitlement to SSP would not be affected.

The proposal forms part of the Government's on-going deregulation programme of lifting burdens and builds on the easements to the SSP rules and the considerable reduction in mandatory record keeping which I am introducing from April 1996.

I consulted last March on whether employers should be allowed to opt out of SSP if they pay at least the equivalent in occupational sick pay. Employers' organisations were generally in favour of opting out as a means of reducing administration costs, but there were concerns that small businesses could not opt out as they do not generally have occupational sick pay schemes and that employees' statutory rights might be removed. The exemption scheme ensures that employees' rights during periods of sickness are fully protected by retaining the underlying liability to pay SSP, while reducing administrative burdens on businesses.

The new arrangements could be introduced from April 1997 by means of an order under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Training and Enterprise Councils

Sir Nicholas Scott: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress Central London TEC and London East TEC are making in meeting the criteria for the award of three-year licence. [8622]

Mr. Paice: I am pleased to announce that the award of three-year licences to Central London TEC, Centec and London East TEC, Letec, which have now completed the process of meeting the rigorous standards we set.

Vocational Qualifications

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what reports she has recently received on national vocational qualifications and Scottish vocational qualifications. [8623]

Mr. Paice: My right hon. Friend is pleased to announce the publication today of a report by Gordon Beaumont, commissioned by the Department, on the most used 100

national vocational qualifications and Scottish vocational qualifications. I very much welcome this independent report from former industrialist and business man Gordon Beaumont which shows that there is much support for national vocational qualifications and Scottish vocational qualifications and the benefits they can bring to employers in improving performance and flexibility. It also suggests many ways in which delivery and take-up of the qualifications could be improved.

The report on the 100 most used NVQs and SVQs, which was commissioned following the Government's White Paper "Competitiveness: Helping Business To Win" is the culmination of a review headed by Mr. Beaumont which was asked to focus on the breadth of the qualification, the specification and assessment of knowledge and understanding, and on cost-effective assessment more generally. It makes recommendations on all these, and some wider issues.

The Department will welcome comments from the national council for vocational qualifications and the Scottish Vocational Education Council, Scotvec, on all these matters. The Government have written to the chairmen of both organisations asking for their responses to this report by the end of the month. Other interested bodies may send their responses to the address shown in the report. After receiving comments, the Department will draw up an action plan next month on how to implement agreed recommendations.

I should like to thank Mr. Beaumont and all members of the evaluation advisory group, which he chaired, for their dedication, energy and commitment in undertaking this considerable task.

Copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

Education (School Premises) Regulations

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what conclusion she has reached following the consultation on the revised Education (School Premises) Regulations. [9026]

Mrs. Gillan: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I received 119 responses to the recent consultation exercise on the revised draft education (School Premises) Regulations. Comments were sent to us by local education authorities, schools, and a number of other organisations.

We have given careful consideration to the responses. The final version of the regulations and the circular will take account of a number of detailed points raised. The requirements in the current regulations that bear on the health, safety and welfare of pupils will be retained.

A number of the responses queried our proposal to deregulate area requirements for teaching accommodation and recreation areas. The Government are not, however, persuaded by the arguments that have been put forward for the retention of these requirements. In particular, we do not accept that the changes will mean that schools will have to accept more pupils or that there are any implications for class size. The powers of admissions authorities will be exactly the same as they are now, while the flexibility of governors and local authorities in the management of school facilities will be increased. We therefore propose to proceed with deregulation of these aspects of the regulations as originally proposed.

While we do not believe there is a case for maintaining the present statutory requirements, we do accept that local education authorities and school governors may find non-statutory guidelines useful for a variety of purposes. Two comprehensive sets of guidance will therefore be published, one covering school accommodation and one covering school grounds.

The guidance will set out a range of possible gross floor and site areas for schools, related to pupil numbers. It will also illustrate appropriate areas for the various curriculum activities, taking into account the requirements of the national curriculum. In conjunction with design bulletins on specific subjects, the guidance will provide benchmarks for LEAs and others to consider when assessing existing premises and when planning capital projects.

We now expect to lay the Education (School Premises) Regulations before Parliament in February.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 11 January 1996

HOME DEPARTMENT

European Union

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what communication he has received from *(a)* the Commission of the European Community and *(b)* the Government of any of its member states concerning those matters of common interest listed in article K1 of the treaty on European Union; what proposals he has received for conventions under the provisions of article K3 2(c); and what (i) material and (ii) information he has published relating thereto. [8254]

Mr. Howard: The Commission, which has a limited right of initiative under article K3(2) of the treaty on European union, has issued three communications to the Council of Ministers concerning matters of common interest under article K1. These related to immigration and asylum policies, a European Union action plan to combat drugs and the possible application of article K9 of the treaty. The Commission has also submitted proposals for a Council decision establishing the convention on the crossing of the external frontiers of the member states and for a convention on the protection of the Communities' financial interests.

Member states enjoy the right to initiate action in all the areas of common interest listed in article K1 and regularly make proposals for specific measures or projects in the Justice and Home Affairs Council and its associated working groups. The Council of Ministers has adopted conventions on simplified extradition procedures, fraud, Europol and the customs information system. Draft instruments currently under negotiation by the member states include: the convention on external frontiers and the associated convention on the European information system; a second stage convention on simplified extradition procedures; and a convention on mutual recognition of driving disqualifications.

Any proposal or communication from the Commission to the Council of Ministers is deposited in Parliament. In accordance with the procedures for scrutiny of European Community documents, the Government publish an explanatory memorandum for each document deposited. Proposals arising from intergovernmental co-operation on justice and home affairs under title VI of the treaty are subject to the separate arrangements for Parliamentary scrutiny of work which apply to that title.

Surinder Singh Judgment

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the additional entitlements of European nationals to bring relatives into the EU and the UK in consequence of the Surinder Singh judgment in the European Court; and if he will publish a booklet explaining the situation; [8521]

(2) what are the implications of the Surinder Singh case in the European Court in so far as the immigration law and the primary purpose rule are concerned; and what estimate has been made of the numbers of persons who have taken advantage of the implications of the judgment. [8522]

Miss Widdecombe: Nationals of the other member states of the European Economic Area are free to come to the United Kingdom with their close family members to exercise rights conferred under the provisions of the treaty of Rome relating to the free movement of workers and rights of residence.

Those rights were not affected by the Surinder Singh judgment, delivered by the European Court of Justice in July 1992. The effect of that judgment is that where a British citizen returns to the United Kingdom after exercising treaty rights in an economic capacity in another member state, his or her third-country national spouse and other close family members are entitled to enter and reside in the United Kingdom under European Community law.

In giving effect to the judgment, we require that the British citizen must have exercised substantive treaty rights in another member state, normally for a period of at least six months, as a worker or in another economically active capacity; those who resided abroad as tourists or students, for example, do not qualify. The primary purpose rule does not apply but the application is refused if the marriage is one of convenience. If the marriage ends in divorce, or if the British citizen goes abroad, the third-country spouse will no longer have a right to reside here under European Community law.

Since the judgment was delivered, we have received 73 applications based on it, of which 59 have been granted.

Europol Convention

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what drafts of the Europol convention concerning the establishment and powers of a European police office were *(a)* published by Her Majesty's Government and *(b)* sent to police authorities or their representative organisations; what outline (i) proposals and (ii) drafts were sent to select committees of both Houses of Parliament; when the convention was signed and by whom on behalf of the United Kingdom; and which drafts were considered at ministerial meetings and on what occasions. [8303]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* The final text of the Europol convention was published, and laid before Parliament, on 8 December last year. Drafts of the convention were not public documents and therefore were not published nor made generally available. The police service were closely consulted throughout the negotiation of the convention through police representative organisations.

An explanatory note on the draft convention was submitted on 22 February 1994. Supplementary explanatory notes, with revised drafts of the convention, were provided on 17 November 1994 and on 31 May 1995. The final text of the convention, together with an accompanying explanatory note, was forwarded on 28 July last year.

Various aspects of the negotiation of the Europol convention were discussed at meetings of the Justice and Home Affairs Council between late 1993 and 1995, but specific drafts of the convention were not considered in detail.

Agreement was reached in principle to the terms of the convention at the European Council meeting at Cannes in June 1995. The convention was subsequently signed on 26 July by Mr. David Bostock, the United Kingdom's deputy permanent representative to the European Union.

South Yorkshire Constabulary (Charges)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the South Yorkshire constabulary charge for the police safe scheme and similar services. [8415]

Mr. Maclean: I understand that South Yorkshire police do not charge for the keyholder list services which they provide.

Doncaster Prison

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list by month since Doncaster prison was opened the number of people detained under immigration powers and held at the prison, indicating from what countries the detainees originally came. [8053]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 11 January 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about immigration detainees held at Doncaster prison.

The number of detainees held at Doncaster are listed by month in the attached table, together with the countries of origin.

List of detainees held at Doncaster

Month	*Number*	*Country of origin.*
June 1994	Nil	—
July 1994	Nil	—
August 1994	Nil	—
September 1994	Nil	—
October 1994	Nil	—
November 1994	Nil	—
December 1994	Nil	—
January 1995	1	Malaya
February 1995	1	Malaya
March 1995	1	Malaya
April 1995	1	Malaya
May 1995	2	Malaya/Jamaica
June 1995	3	Malaya/Jamaica/Colombia
July 1995	3	Malaya/Jamaica/Colombia
August 1995	3	Malaya/Jamaica/Colombia
September 1995	4	Malaya/Jamaica/Colombia
October 1995	6	Malaya/Jamaica/Colombia/ India
November 1995	5	Jamaica/Colombia/India
December 1995	4	Jamaica/Colombia/India

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prisoners were transferred from Doncaster prison in each month since it has been opened, indicating the reason for the transfer in each case, and the name of the prison to which the transfer was made; [8051]

(2) how many prisoners were transferred to Doncaster prison in each month since it has been opened, indicating the reason for the transfer in each case, and the name of the prison to which the transfer was made. [8052]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 11 January 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about transfers in and out of Doncaster prison since it opened.

There are around 2,500 prisoner movements into and out of Doncaster each month. This information could therefore be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Winson Green Prison

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what has been the average occupancy at Winson Green prison in each of the last five years; [7954]

(2) what has been the average prison officer establishment at Winson Green prison in each of the last five years. [7955]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Dr. Lynne Jones, dated 11 January 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Questions about the average prisoner population and the average number of prison officers at Birmingham prison in each of the last five years.

The average prisoner population over the last five years is shown in table one, attached.

The average number of officers working in each of the last five years is given in table two.

Table 1

Year	*Average prisoner population*
1991	956
1992	911
1993	793
1994	752
1995[1]	839

[1] until end November.

Table 2

Year	*Number of discipline officers*	*Discipline officers plus miscellaneous officers such as trades and catering officers*
1991	364	448
1992	378	461
1993	372	454

Table 2

Year	*Number of discipline officers*	*Discipline officers plus miscellaneous officers such as trades and catering officers*
1994	345	425
1995	348	42º

The figure for 1991 are not exact as the method of recording the information at that time was not completely reliable.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the total cost of running Winson Green prison in each of the last five years at *(a)* actual prices and *(b)* current prices; and what are the budgets for 1995–96 and 1996–97. [7956]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Dr. Lynne Jones, dated 11 January 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the cost of running Birmingham prison.

The total net operating costs for the years 1990–91 to 1994–95 at actual and current prices and the present budget for 1995–96 are set out in the attached table. The budget for 1996–97 has not yet been decided.

Financial year	*Actual prices £ million*	*1995–96 prices £ million*
1990–91	14.9	17.7
1991–92	16.9	18.9
1992–93	17.7	19.1
1993–94	15.7	16.4
1994–95	16.1	16.5
1995–96	16.8	16.8

The costs for the years 1990–91 to 1992–93 are calculated on a different basis to later years in that they include notional charges for opportunity cost of rent and depreciation.

Probation Committees

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations are undertaken before appointments are made to local probation committees. [7951]

Mr. Sackville: The majority of probation committee members are magistrates, elected by their benches. Where committees choose to co-opt members of the local community it is for them to decide how to do so: many committees place public advertisements to attract people with suitable interests and experience. Where committees co-opt members of local authorities, as they are required to do in metropolitan areas and may decide to do elsewhere, they should consult the authorities concerned about the appointments.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how local probation committees are accountable to their communities. [7948]

Mr. Sackville: Local probation committees are responsible to their communities through the management of services: by the publication of Her Majesty's inspection reports, annual reports and by an obligation under national standards to liaise closely with local communities.

Risley Prison

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to implement the recommendation of Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons into the women's prison at Risley in respect of the women's health care centre. [8176]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 11 January 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the provision of a new female health care centre at Risley prison.

The recommendation by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons that a new health care centre for women be provided at Risley was accepted. But no promises could be given about the timing of this new provision. This will depend on the redevelopment programme at Risley and on money for new buildings being available.

There are no funds presently earmarked for this scheme but it will continue to be considered alongside other schemes when money is allocated.

The Chief Inspector's most recent report on Risley (the report of an unannounced visit) was published in November 1995. No special mention was made of health care provision for women.

Prisons (Allocation of Sexes)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to discourage the practice of allocating women to wings of male prisons. [8257]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 11 January 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the practice of allocating women to wings of male prisons.

The Prison Service is currently developing a strategy for the future provision of female places. This strategy will be reported to the Home Secretary in the spring of this year.

At present 314 women are held in units at five male prisons. These prisons provide a total of 344 places in areas with a specific shortage of female provision. The current female provision at male establishments allows women to be kept closer to their home areas.

The accommodation provided at these establishments enables female prisoners to be housed in dedicated units on a shared site with distinct access to particular prison facilities.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people lost eligibility for compensation in respect of the death of a relative under the 1994 criminal injuries compensation scheme when the CICB scheme was re-introduced; and what has been the saving to public funds. [8161]

Mr. Maclean: The eligibility of a claimant for compensation can be determined only by reference to the individual circumstances of the case in the light of the relevant scheme. In the great majority of cases where an application was made in respect of a fatal case under the

former tariff scheme, the claimants' eligibility for payment had not been determined when that scheme was withdrawn.

Information on numbers of applications for fatal awards under the tariff scheme, the relationship between the applicant and the victim in those cases, and payments made, was contained in answers given to the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) on 28 November 1995, *Official Report*, columns *652–53*.

New Hall Prison

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many additional inmate places he expects will be available for use by the end of 1996 at Her Majesty's prison New Hall, Wakefield. [8329]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 11 January 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about New Hall prison.

The Prison Service has no plans at present to increase the number of places at New Hall by the end of 1996.

Probation Staff

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list those prisons which have made probation staff redundant over the last year; and if he will make a statement; [7387]

(2) if he will make a statement in respect of those prisons which have reduced *(a)* sex offenders and *(b)* drug treatment programmes over the last year; and if he will make a statement; [7388]

(3) what reductions in probation work, including courses dealing with offending behaviour, have been made at *(a)* Winchester, *(b)* Birmingham and *(c)* Little Hey prisons; and if he will make a statement. [7389]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Alan Beith, dated 11 January 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Questions about redundancies among prison-based probation officers; reductions in prison sex offender and drug treatment programmes and reductions in prison probation work at Winchester, Birmingham and Littlehey prisons during the last year.

No prisons have made probation staff redundant. Probation officers work in prison establishments on secondment from their home probation services. They remain subject to the conditions of service of their local Probation Committee.

Detailed information about treatment programmes for drug misusers in individual prisons is not held centrally but every prison must develop a local strategy to reduce the supply and demand for drugs, to rehabilitate drug misusers and to minimise the potential for damage to the health of prisoners, staff and the wider community.

With the exception of Littlehey prison, there has been no reduction in sex offender programmes at any prison and there has been no reduction in probation work at Winchester or Birmingham. At Littlehey, probation staff, with uniformed staff, lead sex-offender treatment programmes. A combination of factors including sick leave and staff changes led to the cancellation of some sex offender treatment sessions during the summer.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria he will use for determining whether an upheaval has taken place in a country for the purposes of determining whether asylum seekers claiming after entry into the United Kingdom should qualify for income support; and which countries he assesses to be currently undergoing such an upheaval. [7400]

Miss Widdecombe: My right hon. and learned Friend will notify the Benefits Agency if a country undergoes a fundamental change in circumstances such that people are not normally being required to return to it for the time being. Each upheaval will be separately assessed and a judgment made as to whether people should be required to return. This assessment will be based on the latest available relevant information from a wide range of sources.

Internet

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what web site his Department maintains on the Internet; what information is provided there; how often it is updated; what is the address; and if he or his Department answers questions and supplies additional information through the Internet. [7570]

Mr. Howard: My Department does not maintain its own World Wide Web site on the Internet, but uses *(a)* the electronic news distribution service of the Central Office of Information for the publication of press releases on the web, and *(b)* the web site known as the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency Government information service, maintained by CCTA—the Government centre for information systems—for other information. My Department does not yet have its wwn home page, but has four separate presences on the web as follows:

(a) Press release

(address-http://www.coi.gov.uk/coi/depts/GHO/GHO.html)

(b) Research & Statistics Department, for publication of statistics which are also published in conventional form

address-http://www.open.gov.uk/home_off/rsdhome.htm)

(c) United Kingdom Passport Agency, for general information about passports and passport offices

(address-http://www.open.gov.uk/ukpass/ukpass.htm)

(d) Immigration & Nationality Department, for general information about immigration and nationality

(address-http://www.open.gov.uk/coi/ind.htm).

Press releases and statistics are published as they are published on paper. Information from the United Kingdom Passport Agency and the immigration and nationality department is updated as necessary. Neither I nor my Department at present uses the Internet for answering questions or supplying additional information.

Prison Service Staff

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison service staff were employed, by category and in total in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [7369]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 11 January 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question requesting information about the number and category of staff employed by the Prison Service in each of the last five years.

The attached tables, copies of which will be placed in the Library of the House, are based on information held in the personnel information computer system. They show the total Prison Service staff, broken down by grade and gender, at the beginning of each financial year since 1990, except for 1991 where the 1 April figure is unavailable and so the figure for 1 October has bee used instead.

Mr. Clive Broomfield

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to be able to answer the hon. Member for Lewisham, East's letters of 19 July, 2 October and 1 November on behalf of Mr. Clive Bromfield. [6921]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. Richard Tilt to Ms Bridget Prentice, dated 11 January 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about when you will receive full replies to your earlier letters on behalf of Mr. Clive Bromfield.

Your letters were passed to me for answer as I have operational responsibility for the Prison Service. I hope to be able to send a full reply shortly.

National Lottery

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the awards made to charities in Worcestershire from national lottery funds; and what is the size of the grant and total project cost in each case. [6132]

Mr. Sackville: I would refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for National Heritage on 9 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *61*. This includes details of the grants given by the National Lottery Charities Board to charities and voluntary groups based in Worcestershire.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Civil Service Management Functions

Dr. Spink: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what delegations have been made in 1995 under the Civil Service (Management Functions) Act 1992; to whom those delegations were made; and what were the main conditions that were attached to them. [8645]

Mr. Freeman: The table lists delegations made under the Civil Service (Management Functions) Act 1992 since the last report to Parliament, *Official Report*, 11 January 1995, col. *140*. In some cases, for staff appointed by statutory office holders, Ministers were statutorily required to give consent to terms and conditions of service. For such staff, delegation has been effected by waiving that requirement, subject to the conditions attached to the delegation.

List of delegations made in 1995 under The Civil Service (Management Functions) Act 1992

Delegation	*Nature of delegation*	*Recipients*	*Main conditions*
1. Delegation of pay and certain conditions of service.	Authority to determine pay and certain pay-related conditions of service of civil servants below the new Senior Civil Service. The pay and certain pay-related conditions of service of Agency Chief Executives are also excluded from the scope of the delegations.	Ministers in charge of departments for the following organisations: Child Support Agency Government Communications Headquarters, Highways Agency, Historic Scotland, Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce Meat Hygiene Service Paymaster Service Children's Schools (North West Europe) War Pensions Agency	(i) The recipient must continue to comply with certain sections of the Civil Service Management Code. (ii) Changes made to terms and conditions must provide value for money and be made in a way which does not jeopardise essential public expenditure safeguards.

Previous service—wide delegations extended to other organisations in 1995

Delegation	*Recipients*
1. Travel; Overseas Accountable Entertainment Allowance; relocation expenses; rent for key staff who occupy government owned residential properties; boarding school allowance.	Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service Health and Safety Executive Health and Safety Commission (in respect of staff appointed by Health and Safety Executive)
2. Rent for key staff who occupy government owned residential properties; boarding school allowance.	Central Statistical Office

Previous service—wide delegations extended to other organisations in 1995

Delegation	*Recipients*
3. Minimum recruitment criteria; travel; overseas accountable entertainment allowance; relocation expenses; rent for key staff who occupy government owned residential properties; boarding school allowance; recruitment and retention allowance; and recruitment and retention allowances for staff overseas.	Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and Health Service Commissioner

HOUSE OF COMMONS

House Library Department

Mr. Bennett: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, what consideration the House of Commons Commission has given to the proposal of the Information Committee regarding the name of the House Library Department; and if he will make a statement. [7985]

Mr. Beith: At its last meeting, the Commission considered a proposal to change the name of the Department of the House of Commons Library to that of the House of Commons Library and Research Department. After careful consideration, and taking account of the advice of the Information Committee and of the high reputation of the House of Commons Library, the Commission decided against the change in name.

Upper Waiting Hall Exhibitions

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to "Schizophrenia-Fear, Fact or Fiction" to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall. [8555]

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 25 March to Friday 29 March 1996.

ENVIRONMENT

Docklands Light Railway

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has made it a condition of any applications for privatisation, ownership or operation of the docklands light railway that *(a)* fare levels are the same as for London Underground Ltd., *(b)* it will remain part of the London public transport zone scheme, *(c)* zone-period passes will remain valid at London fare levels and *(d)* the pensioners' pass scheme will continue for this line. [8249]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Government's policy is that the docklands light railway will continue to participate in

the London public transport zone scheme and to participate in the joint through-ticketing arrangements, including Travelcard, when its operations and management are franchised to a private sector operator later this year. Passengers should therefore, as now, be able to use the full range of London-wide tickets on the DLR at the same prices as on London Underground. The DLR currently sets its own fares for DLR-only journeys and this will also continue after franchising. The DLR takes part in the London boroughs concessionary travel scheme and offers pensioners and others free travel, as on London Underground. Our policy is that this should continue, subject to funds continuing to be available from the boroughs.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give for each year of the operation of the docklands light railway, *(a)* the number of train miles in service, *(b)* the number of passenger miles travelled, *(c)* the cost (i) per train mile and (ii) per passenger mile of all costs other than capital for construction, *(d)* the subsidy per passenger mile and *(e)* the percentage of non-capital costs received from passengers and London pooled income. [8250]

Sir Paul Beresford: The following table sets out the relevant statistics on the docklands light railway from 1 April 1992, when the Secretary of State for the Environment took on responsibility for the railway:

Docklands Light Railway 1992–93 to 1995–96

		1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*[1]1995–96*
(a)	the number of train miles in service	0.69 million	0.65 million	1.05 million	1.24 million
(b)	the number of passenger miles travelled	20 million	24 million	37 million	46 million
(c)	(i) the operating cost per train mile	£28.0	£29.3	£23.2	£18.1
	(ii) the operating cost per passenger mile	£0.95	£0.79	£0.62	£0.48
(d)	the subsidy per passenger mile	£0.77	£0.60	£0.43	£0.27
(e)	the percentage of non-capital costs received from passengers and London pooled income.	23 per cent.	24 per cent.	30 per cent.	42 per cent.

[1] Estimated outturn figures.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the capital investment, at constant prices, including additional costs arising from adjustment to control or signalling systems, for each phase of construction of the docklands light railway and the estimated cost of its extension to Lewisham together with the contributions to that capital expenditure not originating from public funds, stating their respective sources. [8248]

Sir Paul Beresford: The capital cost of the docklands light railway, at constant 1995 prices is as follows:

Initial railway: £90 million

Extension to Bank and upgrading: £295 million

Extension to Beckton: £280 million

Resignalling/improvements: £56 million

Prime contract: £30 million

Total: £751 million

Olympia and York made a contribution of £95 million at 1995 prices to the Bank extension and Canary Wharf station. The extension of the DLR to Lewisham will be built as a joint venture under the Government's private finance initiative at a cost of over £100 million. The amount of private sector investment will be established following the tendering exercise now under way.

New Unitary Authorities

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the last date on which orders must be placed for the establishment of new unitary authorities so that elections can take place on 2 May. [8625]

Sir Paul Beresford: There is no strict requirement to lay a structural change order by a particular date. However, where there is to be reorganisation, it is our policy that there should be full elections to the future unitary authority the year before the transfer of responsibilities. As a result, given the requirements governing the publication of the notice of election in the Local Elections (Principal Areas) Rules 1986 along the administrative needs of the returning officer, we consider that an order should be made not less than two months before the date of the election to which it relates.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 11 January. [8138]

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 11 January. [8139]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is in Paris representing Her Majesty's Government at the commemorative service for the late President Mitterrand.

Regulators

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the regulators, indicating their dates of appointment, period of tenure, salary, including any performance-related element, and their previous employment prior to employment with salary plus bonuses, where these are *(a)* known and *(b)* in the public domain. [8121]

The Prime Minister: The information is shown in the table:

Office	Regulator	First appointment	Term	Salary[1]	Former employment	Former salary[2]
Electricity supply	Professor Stephen Littlechild	1st September 1989	5+5	102,500	Birmingham University	—
Fair trading	Mr. John Bridgeman	1st October 1995	5	130,000	British Alcan	191,000
Gas supply	Ms Clare Spottis-woode	1st November 1993	5	90,000	Self employed	—
National lottery	Mr. Peter Davis	25th October 1993	5	84,255	Sturge Holdings plc	—
Rail	Mr. John Swift	1st December 1993	5	131,650	Queens Counsel	—
Telecommunications	Mr. Donald Cruickshank	1st April 1993	5	126,400	NHS Scotland	—
Water services	Mr. Ian Byatt	1st August 1989	5+2	81,381	HM Treasury	59,800

[1] No regulators receive performance related pay.
[2] Where known and in the public domain.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

East Timor

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 18 December, *Official Report*, column *839*, of whom inquiries were made to investigate the reports about Hawk aircraft flying over East Timor and by whom; and what criteria were applied to judge the validity of the information. [8011]

Mr. Hanley: Various inquiries were made of confidential sources, which it would not be proper to disclose. As I said in my answer on 18 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *839*, we have looked into the reports about Hawk aircraft over East Timor but have found no evidence to substantiate them.

Executive Agencies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if answers sent to hon. Members in reply to parliamentary questions by the head of executive agencies in his Department are *(a)* seen, *(b)* approved and *(c)* amended by him before they are sent; and if he will identify such letters to which amendments by him have been made in 1994–95. [7831]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Parliamentary questions are passed to the head of an executive agency for reply when the matter is one delegated to him or her under the agency framework document. The relevant Minister may see a copy of the reply before it is sent, but would not normally intervene in operational matters. Records are not kept of any amendments by Ministers.

Kashmir

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent steps the Govnerment have taken to secure the release of the European hostages in Kashmir. [7941]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We are co-operating closely in Delhi, Srinagar and capitals with the Indian and other Governments concerned, and continue to work for the safe and early release of Paul Wells, Keith Mangan and the other hostages. All Governments involved, the relatives, and a number of interested groups in the region have appealed for the immediate and safe release of the hostages.

We keep in close touch with the families and give factual briefing also to the constituency Member of Parliament involved.

Harjit Singh

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his latest discussions with the Indian Govnerment regarding the case of Harjit Singh. [8177]

Mr. Hanley: We remain in touch with the Indian authorities about the case of Harjit Singh. The latest court hearing was on 28 November, when the judge ordered an inquiry by the Central Bureau of Intelligence. We await its outcome.

Anglo-French Military Co-operation

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all committees which members of his Department assist or serve upon which discuss military co-operation between Britain and France as part of their remit. [8281]

Mr. David Davis: Military co-operation between Britain and France is discussed in the following committees: the Franco-British Joint Commission on Nuclear Doctrine and Policy; the Franco-British Euro Air Group steering group and working group; and the UK-France political/military working group. There are also a number of multilateral groups which discuss multilateral military co-operation.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department in what circumstances an individual earning £18,000 per year and renting out a property would qualify for legal aid. [7798]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: An applicant will satisfy financial qualifications for legal aid if disposable income and capital fall within the statutory requirements. Disposable income and capital is that which is left from total income and capital after certain allowances have been deducted. Non-contributory civil legal aid as available if an individual's disposable income and capital are below £2,425 and £3,000 respectively. If disposable income falls between £2,425 and £7,187, or £7,920 for personal injury cases, respectively, an individual will have to pay a contribution. If disposable income and capital are above the upper limits then an individual will be outside the scheme. In criminal cases an applicant will receive non-contributory legal aid if weekly disposable income and capital is below £47 and £3,000 respectively. A contribution will be required if weekly disposable income and capital is above those limits. There are no upper limits in criminal legal aid.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the criteria for eligibility for legal aid. [7799]

Mr. Evans: The financial eligibility criteria for both civil and criminal legal aid are set out in my answer today to the hon. Member's question about the circumstances in which an individual earning £18,000 per year and renting out property would qualify for legal aid.

In civil cases, the applicant must also satisfy the Legal Aid Board that he or she has reasonable grounds for taking, defending or being a party to proceedings, and that it is reasonable in the particular circumstances of the case for legal aid to be granted. These tests must be met throughout the time that the case is legally aided.

In criminal cases, the court must also be satisfied that it is in the interests of justice that the applicant should have legal representation. In deciding whether it is the interests of justice, the court must take several factors into account, including whether the charge against the defendant is so serious that he or she may be imprisoned or lose his job if convicted or whether there is a substantial point of law to be considered in the case.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps a member of the public can take to ensure that a fraudulent claim for legal aid is properly investigated. [7800]

Mr. Evans: Members of the public can write to the Legal Aid Board if they have any evidence or suspicion that a fraudulent claim has been made for civil legal aid or for green form advice and assistance. The board will investigate any allegations of fraud. Allegations of false declaration of means by an assisted person are referred to the Benefits Agency to investigate further. If the allegations are substantiated, the Legal Aid Board revokes the legal aid certificate and the assisted person is liable to pay all costs incurred. Certain cases may be referred to the police who will consider prosecution under section 39 of the Legal Aid Act 1988.

Members of the public who have evidence of a fraudulent claim for criminal legal aid should write to the relevant court. The courts investigate allegations of fraudulent claims and refer substantiated allegations to the police.

Interdepartmental Working Group on Marriage

Mr. Sims: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what progress has been made by the interdepartmental working party on marriage. [9473]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The interdepartmental working party on marriage is working on a summary of its findings so far. It hopes to hold a seminar for interested service providers and researchers in February or March this year to discuss these findings before finalising them. The working party is grateful to all those groups who have responded so fully and promptly to its questionnaire.

The working party has given a preliminary indication of the types of initiatives at which it believes resources may need to be targeted. These are:

- marriage preparation projects;
- encouraging people to access services before a problem becomes a crisis;
- encouraging innovation as one service will not suit the needs of every person seeking help—there needs to be variety; and
- looking at whether some families have more specific needs, for example it is not clear whether the needs of stepfamilies and families from ethnic minorities are being met at present.

The Government intend to work with organisations which seek to support marriage in examining the potential of these initiatives. Following consultation with these organisations at the planned seminar, the Government will consider bids for the funding of pilot projects in areas with particular potential for reducing the incidence and costs of marriage breakdown. The primary purpose of this exercise will be to evaluate the effectiveness and value for money of potential initiatives, particularly in the area of marriage preparation and new types of service provision. Organisations will need to specify how they will demonstrate the effectiveness and value for money of their service in preparing any such bids.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Overdue Commercial Debt

Dr. Michael Clark: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to review the case for a statutory right to interest on overdue commercial debt; and what form that review will take. [9378]

Mr. Page: The 1994 White Paper "Competitiveness—Helping Business to Win"—Cm 2563—announced a package of measures which the Government would introduce to tackle late payment. It also committed the Government to review the case for statutory interest

"if there has not been a significant improvement within the next two years"

There have been some signs of improving payment times in the UK, but late payment continues to be of concern to a number of small firms. Therefore, even though the package of measures now largely in place has not been so for long enough to have had an impact on late payment, I have decided to look again at the arguments

for and against statutory interest. The review will be in the context of my wider consideration of how the problem of late payment can best be addressed. I have today invited relevant submissions from representative bodies who responded to the public consultation in November 1993. The submission will be considered alongside research and survey evidence. The outcome of the review will be published in the summer.

EU Structural Funds

Dr. Michael Clark: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if there will be a revision of the areas eligible for grant from the EU structural funds under objective 2. [9379]

Mr. Eggar: The European Commission has been reviewing the current list of areas, but is not committed to revising it. The Government's view is that revision would not be in the national interest.

I am glad to say that, at an informal meeting of EU Ministers which I attended in Madrid on 1 December, there was general consensus on the part of member states in favour of "complete continuity" between the current list of areas, which expires at the end of 1996, and the list for the period 1997–99.

A formal decision from the Commission is expected during the coming weeks.

Arms Sales

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what criteria are used in checking end-use certification of arms sales; and what information the Government publish on this matter. [7689]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 10 January 1996]:* Appropriate documentation to provide evidence of end-use must be supplied in support of applications for individual licences to export arms and military equipment. If the consignee is an overseas Government, the applicant must provide a copy of the official order or the appropriate parts of the contract. In respect of small arms, requirements vary according to the country of destination: for many countries the applicant provides appropriate import certification from the authorities in the importing country. In all other cases, specific end-use undertakings have to be provided in a prescribed format and on the end-user's headed notepaper. The information in the supporting documentation is assessed by the Department of Trade and Industry export control organisation, and by other Government Departments from which the DTI takes advice in considering the application. The Government give guidance on the type of supporting documentation which must be supplied, the circumstances in which they are required, the information they need to contain and the format in which they must be supplied.

Nigeria (Arms Embargo)

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he has taken on the European ban on arms exports to Nigeria; and how this applies to *(a)* dual use goods and *(b)* existing contracts. [7688]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 10 January 1996]:* In common with arms embargoes against other countries, the embargo against Nigeria is enforced by means of the export licensing regime operated by the Department of Trade and Industry. Any licence applications which may be made in respect of embargoed goods to the relevant destinations are considered in light of the terms of the embargo in question. The embargo against Nigeria includes all military, security and paramilitary goods and arms, ammunition and related material which is listed in schedule 1, part III, group 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994. The embargo does not include other categories of goods which are controlled under that order, although such goods remain under strict licensing control. Nor does it extend to existing contracts for defence equipment for which individual licences have been issued.

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to reject all further licences for the sale of arms to Nigeria; and if he will make a statement. [6939]

Mr. Oppenheim: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) on 12 December 1995, *Official Report*, columns *599–600.*

Interreg Programme

Mr. Wigley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the amounts of money paid or committed in respect of projects in each of the member states of the European Union under the Interreg programme for each available year since its inception. [7038]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 20 December 1995]:* I have information about amounts of money committed in respect of projects only in the UK. Interreg grants so committed have been as follows:

1991: £3.7 million

1992: £8.2 million

1993: £17.3 million

1994: £6.7 million

1995: £1.5 million

Total allocations of Interreg II A grants for 1994–99 are as follows:

	Ecu million
UK	109.4
France	24.6
Germany	402.2
Italy	347.4
Spain	564.7
Netherlands	69.1
Belgium	8.2
Luxembourg	3.5
Republic of Ireland	133.5
Denmark	17.7
Portugal	339.7
Greece	59.5
Sweden	39.5
Finland	43.7
Austria	42.7

For Interreg I, the amounts are not available to me.

Ceramic Industry (Quotas)

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement in respect of the retention of existing quotas relating to the ceramic industry. [6937]

Mr. Oppenheim: The Commission is about to report to member states on the operation and future of the EC's quotas on certain imports from China, including ceramicware. The Government will consider the report once it is available.

Army Vehicle Contracts

Mr. Spellar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has made to the Ministry of Defence regarding contracts for *(a)* army field ambulances and *(b)* non-military vehicles for use in Germany. [7141]

Mr. Oppenheim: My Department keeps in close touch with the Ministry of Defence on major procurement programmes, including the two mentioned by the hon. Gentleman. Our objective is to ensure that the industrial implications of purchasing decisions are taken fully into account.

The Government are committed, however, to full and open competition for defence contracts and final decisions on particular contracts will quite rightly be based primarily on value for money and operational considerations.

Companies Act 1985 (Definition of Harm)

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what definition he uses of harm to the public when deciding whether to make a direction under section 32 of the Companies Act 1985. [6682]

Mr. Oppenheim: No definition of harm to the public is used when considering whether to make a direction under section 32 of the Companies Act. I assess each case on its merits, taking into account the circumstances.

When deciding such cases, I consider whether there are reasons for thinking, or evidence indicating, that the public would be likely to suffer harm as a result of the name. There must be evidence of harm or of the likelihood of harm; mere speculative harm would not be enough. I also take care to consider the likely impact of a direction on a company's business.

Manufacturing Investment

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received recently about manufacturing investment in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the north west region. [7649]

Mr. Oppenheim: I and other DTI Ministers regularly receive representations about manufacturing industry and manufacturing investment. For example, in the north-west, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade discussed issues facing manufacturers at a meeting with the Consortium of Lancashire Aerospace on 24 November. He has also recently received representations on behalf of the automotive sector in the north west.

Postage Costs

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the effect of *(a)* 1p, *(b)* 2p, *(c)* 3p and *(d)* 5p increase on the cost of (i) first-class and (ii) second-class stamps on firms with under (1) 100, (2) 50, (3) 20 and (4) 10 employees. [7554]

Mr. Oppenheim: None. It is for the Post Office to assess the detailed impact of any changes in letter tariff rates on its customers and on mail traffic volumes. The impact on companies of higher postal charges will depend on the nature of their business rather than on the number of employees. An increase of 1p on first and second-class letter tariffs equates to a 0.008 per cent. increase in the retail prices index. By international standards, UK letter tariffs represent very good value for money both in terms of cost and of quality of service. Royal Mail's letter tariffs last increased in November 1993 and the Post Office is committed to maintaining the present rates until March 1996, the longest period of stability since the 1960s.

Insolvency Agency

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to make an announcement about the future of the Insolvency Agency. [7755]

Mr. Oppenheim: I expect to make an announcement about the future of the Insolvency Service at the end of January 1996.

Company Failures (Construction Industry)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many construction industry related companies have failed in each of the last five years. [8262]

Mr. Oppenheim: The following table shows company insolvencies, including partnerships, for the construction industry in England and Wales, 1990–94.

Company Insolvencies: construction industry

(England and Wales)

Year	*Number*
1990	2,445
1991	3,373
1992	3,830
1993	3,189
1994	2,401

Source:
DTI

HEALTH

Chauffeur-driven Cars

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost of chauffeur-driven cars used by his Department was in each of the past five years. [5852]

Mr. Horam: The available information is shown in the table. Information for financial years 1990–91 to 1992–93 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Financial year	Total amount excluding VAT (£)
1994–95	316,609
1993–94	326,740

NHS Trusts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the management costs of national health service trusts in England for the financial year 1994–95; and if he will make a statement. [8455]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) on 4 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *37*.

NHS Contracts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 24 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *336*, if he will provide a breakdown of NHS contracts by *(a)* type and *(b)* region. [3330]

Mr. Malone *[pursuant to his reply, 14 December 1995, c. 804]:* I regret that my previous reply is incorrect. It should read as follows:

The numbers of national health service contracts, by regional health authority, for the years 1993–94, 1994–95 and 1995–96 are shown in the tables. The information available on contracts by type is contained in the "Review of Contracting" for 1994–95, copies of which are available in the Library.

Total number of contracts

Regional health authorities	1993–94	1994–95
Northern	181	146
Yorkshire	146	148
Trent	246	279
East Anglia	116	157
North West Thames	310	345
North East Thames	255	247
South West Thames	435	476
Wessex	238	206
Oxford	174	186
South Western	115	237
West Midlands	724	606
Mersey	82	79
North Western	659	271
South East Thames	301	122
Total	3,982	3,505

Total number of contracts

Regions	1995–96
North and Western	365
West Midlands	744
Trent	342
Anglia and Oxford	311
South Western	375
South Thames	544
North Thames	753
Northern and Yorkshire	303
Total	3,737

Edgware General Hospital

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what meetings he has had with opponents of the closure of the accident and emergency department of Edgware general hospital; if he has completed reconsideration of the proposals to close the Department; and if he will make a statement. [8000]

Mr. Malone: My right hon. Friend has discussed the issue on a number of occasions with interested parties. Most recently he met two deputations on 13 December 1995. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) on 19 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *1140*.

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations he has received opposing the closure of the accident and emergency department of Edgware general hospital. [8003]

Mr. Malone: Approximately 5,000 such representations have been received, mostly pre-printed postcards.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Probation Officers

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what factors have led to the retention of the social work qualification for probation officers following its abolition in England and Wales; and what proposals he has to bring Northern Ireland into line with England and Wales. [8305]

Sir John Wheeler: There is no statutory requirement in Northern Ireland for probation officers to hold a social work qualification. However, it has been a policy of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland, for many years now, to recruit only those with such a qualification. Developments in England and Wales, following abolition of the social work qualification, will be watched closely. Any proposal to change the current Northern Ireland arrangements will be made in accordance with the particular needs and circumstances of Northern Ireland.

Nurses

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the total number of second level registered nurses; and how many are currently undertaking training to convert to first level registration. [8335]

Mr. Moss *[holding answer 10 January 1996]:* The total number of second level registered nurses is not held centrally. This information is available on the database of the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting situated at 23 Portland place, London. The total number of second level registered nurses currently at 31 December 1995 undertaking training to convert to first level registration is 331.

Government Purchasing Service

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the prior options study of the Northern Ireland Government purchasing service

was completed; and what has been the outcome of the study. [9377]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: On 7 March 1995 my right hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) announced that the functions of the Government purchasing service of the Department of Finance and Personnel would be subject to a prior options study. That study is now complete and I have concluded that the functions should be undertaken in future by a new next steps agency. It is my intention to begin preparations for the launch of such an agency so that it might begin operation from 1 April 1996. I am satisfied that will ensure continuous improvement through partnership with suppliers to deliver long-term benefits for Northern Ireland and improve competitiveness in the market place.

I also believe that the agency, in time, might prove suitable for privatisation, and I intend to look again at this possibility in due course. In the interim, there are a range of services associated with the work of the proposed agency which could be contracted out and steps will now be taken to market test these activities.

TREASURY

Government Activities (Efficiency)

10. **Mr. Stewart:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he has taken to increase efficiency in the Government's activities. [7085]

Mrs. Angela Knight: We have already reduced the cost of Government by more than £500 million a year. Provision for the running costs of civil departments for 1998–99 is more than 12 per cent. lower than this year.

Investment

11. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to increase investment in the economy of the United Kingdom. [7086]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Industry is expanding capacity as needed. In the third quarter of 1995, manufacturing investment was 12 per cent. up on a year earlier, and 21 per cent. higher than at the end of 1993. This shows that we have created the right climate for investment.

23. **Ms Quin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he plans to meet representatives of the Confederation of British Industry to discuss investment in British industry. [7098]

Mrs. Angela Knight : My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer regularly meets representatives from the Confederation of British Industry to discuss a range of issues.

Economic Performance

13. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the economic position of the United Kingdom in relation to competitor countries. [7088]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The UK is well placed in relation to competitor countries, with healthy growth, low inflation, sound public finances, falling unemployment, a competitive exchange rate and rising investment.

22. **Mr. Austin-Walker:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's economic performance relative to that of other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. [7097]

Mrs. Angela Knight: In its 1995 survey of the UK economy, the OECD said that the UK was "among the pace setters" in its supply side reforms, adding that

"the sweeping structural reforms launched in the 1980s are yielding dividends in a more flexible, competitive and less inflation-prone economy",

which grew faster than the OECD average in both 1993 and 1994, and is forecast to have done so again in 1995.

Savings

14. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his policies to encourage saving. [7089]

Mr. Jack: The Government believe in encouraging saving and rewarding thrift. That is why we reduced the rate of tax on savings income from 25 per cent. to 20 per cent. for basic rate taxpayers in the recent Budget, benefiting 14 million savers who are basic rate taxpayers. This builds on our successful schemes such as PEPs and TESSAs and reinforces the benefit to savers from the best inflation record for almost 50 years.

Inflation and Interest Rates

15. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he had received following the December figures on inflation and interest rates. [7090]

Mrs. Angela Knight: We have received a number of representations welcoming lower interest rates and the best performance on inflation for almost 50 years.

19. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on interest rates. [7094]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Interest rates were cut by ¼ per cent. to 6½ per cent. on 13 December. This cut in rates was appropriate and fully consistent with meeting the inflation target of 2½ per cent. or less.

Fraud

16. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he is taking to combat fraud. [7091]

Mr. Jack: The Government attach a high priority to tackling all types of fraud and abuse. The measures we have introduced to combat social security fraud are already saving the taxpayer over £1 billion a year, expected to reach £2.5 billion a year by 1998–99. Customs and Excise is strengthening its intelligence and investigation activities, including over 200 more staff over the next three years, while Inland Revenue attaches similar priority to tackling fraud. In addition, the Treasury has recently issued its annual letter on fraud within

Government Departments, so that managers throughout Government will be aware of fraud risks, and will be able to strengthen systems to counter those risks.

Tax Revenues

17. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of tax revenue is raised through *(a)* direct taxes and *(b)* value added tax; and what were the percentages raised through these taxes in 1979. [7092]

Mr. Jack: The shares of direct taxes and VAT in total taxes and national insurance contributions were 55 per cent. and 18 per cent., respectively, in financial year 1994–95. Comparable figures for 1979–80 were 56 per cent. and 12 per cent.

The share of income tax has fallen from 29 per cent. to 27 per cent. over the same period.

Budget Representations

18. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the Budget. [7093]

Mr. Waldegrave: As usual, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer received a large number of representations in the run-up to the Budget and he has also received a number since he made his Budget statement in November.

Pensioners' Savings

20. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of pensioners have savings or investment income. [7095]

Mr. Jack: Around three-quarters of pensioners now have some investment income.

Government Spending

21. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he has taken to reduce wasteful Government spending. [7096]

Mr. Waldegrave: We have sharply reduced civil service running costs. We have undertaken fundamental expenditure reviews and senior management reviews of nearly all major Departments. All Departments are required to produce annual plans to show how they will improve efficiency by market testing, contracting out and other means and all next steps agencies are set specific efficiency targets.

Economic Growth

24. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what level of growth is forecast in the economy of the south-west region by the end of 1996. [7099]

Mr. Waldegrave: The Government do not produce regional economic forecasts. However, gross domestic product for the UK as a whole is forecast to grow by 3 per cent. in 1996.

Small Businesses

25. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what impacts his Budget announcements will have on small businesses. [7102]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Budget will encourage growth in output and jobs in small firms.

Single Currency

26. **Mr. John Townend:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost to British banking and industry of the conversion to a single currency; and who will bear the cost. [7103]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Government have not made a firm estimate of the transitional costs to banks and industry, associated with the change to a single currency, that would be incurred if the United Kingdom participated in the third stage of economic and monetary union. Such costs would be met by those affected, and they would be among the factors that would need to be taken into account, at the appropriate time, when the Government make their assessment of whether it is in the United Kingdom's interest to join a move to the third stage of economic and monetary union.

Under protocol 11 of the EC treaty, the United Kingdom will not be obliged or committed to move to the third stage of economic and monetary union without a separate decision to do so by the Government and Parliament. We will agree to take part in a single currency only if it is in our interests to do so, given the circumstances at the time.

Cider

27. **Sir Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what he estimates will be the additional revenues arising from sales of premium ciders and the change in duty on cider levy and strength greater of 7.5 per cent. alcohol. [7104]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Financial Statement and Budget Report showed that the duty increase on very strong ciders is estimated to raise £10 million in its first full year, over and above what would be gained from increasing the duty in line with inflation.

Public Spending

28. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what priority he attaches to cutting public spending as a proportion of gross domestic product. [7105]

Mr. Waldegarave: The Government are determined to reduce the share that they take of national output below 40 per cent. and we are on track to do so.

Low Incomes (Budget Effects)

Mr. Betts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of the Budget on the poorest 10 per cent. of the population. [7101]

Mr. Jack: All income tax payers will gain from income tax cuts in the Budget. Pensioners and others on low

incomes will gain from rising benefits, mostly uprated by 3.9 per cent. from April, or 3 per cent. for income-related benefits. All households stand to gain from our sound economic policies, which have already cut unemployment by over 700,000 since 1992.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Organic Cultivation

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to encourage more farmers to adopt organic methods of cultivation. [7716]

Mr. Boswell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright) on 6 July 1995, *Official Report*, column *365*.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what number of suspected BSE cases were notified during the past 12 weeks. [7990]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* The number of suspected BSE cases notified and placed under restriction in the 12 weeks from 26 September 1995 to 19 December 1995 was 3,996.

Executive Agencies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if answers sent to hon. Members in reply to parliamentary questions by the head of executive agencies in his Department are *(a)* seen, *(b)* approved and *(c)* amended by him before they are sent; and if he will identify such letters to which amendments by him have been made in 1994–95. [7836]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Parliamentary questions are passed to the head of an executive agency for reply when the matter is one delegated to him or her under the agency framework document. The relevant Minister may see a copy of the reply before it is sent, but would not normally intervene in operational matters. As far as I am aware, no replies have been changed by Ministers in this Department in the period in question.

Fishing Vessels

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from marine heritage organisations concerning EU regulations and consequential United Kingdom legislation requiring owners of sound, seaworthy and hand built traditional wooden vessels used for fishing to be destroyed, or rendered incapable of use on water or being disposed of to any private person or body for uses other than fishing, under any scheme of registration as a condition of receiving de-commissioning grant; and what replies he has sent [8216]

Mr. Baldry: I have recently received representations from the following organisations with regard to the decommissioning of traditional wooden fishing vessels:

The 40+ Fishing Boat Association of the British Isles

The Colne Smack Preservation Society

The Historic Warship Preservation Society

In replying to all these bodies, I have made it clear that it is a requirement of Council regulation 3699/93 that decommissioned vessels are permanently excluded from fishing in Community waters. Experience has shown that it is only by requiring vessels to be made permanently unseaworthy that we can guarantee meeting our obligations. It is also a requirement that vessels of less than 25 gross registered tonnes have to be scrapped to qualify for Community aid. Nevertheless, I am always willing to consider any suggestions an applicant may make for alternatives to scrapping which provide the same degree of certainty in protecting public expenditure.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Betts: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will provide a breakdown of administration costs incurred to date and forecast for the future on PFI work. [5721]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* Quantifiable administration costs incurred to date on PFI amount to some £20,000 annually. Forecast future costs are broadly similar.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Aboriginal Artefacts

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what reports she or her predecessors have received from United Kingdom museums regarding the offer for sale of aboriginal artefacts from the Broome area of Western Australia; and if she will make a statement. [8002]

Mr. Sproat: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is not aware of any reports received by her, or her predecessors, from United Kingdom museums regarding the offer for sale of Aboriginal artefacts from the Broome area of Western Australia.

Iron Age Artefacts (Theft)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what reports she has received alleging the theft and sale to the British museum of historic artefacts from the Salisbury area; and if she will make a statement. [8001]

Mr. Sproat: I understand from the British museum that it purchased a collection of bronze artefacts of the British iron age of unknown provenance.

Research by the museum into the provenance of a group of miniature bronze shields included in this collection led to arrests in 1993. A site at Netherhampton,

Wiltshire, was excavated by the museum and confirmed as the source of an extensive hoard which included these shields.

On 2 May 1995 the finders of the hoard were convicted. Ownership of the shields has now reverted to the estate of the owner of the land on which the shields were found.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Chief Inspector of Schools

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will place in the Library copies of advertisements for the post of chief inspector of schools together with the job description and contract of employment and the minimum period in respect of the current terms of office or the renewal of contract; and what *(a)* advice and *(b)* instructions were issued by her to the panel which appointed the present incumbent. [8253]

Mr. Robin Squire: The chief inspector of schools is appointed by Order in Council, under the provisions of the Education (Schools) Act 1992, on similar terms and conditions as apply to other senior public appointments. The Education (Schools) Act 1992 specifies a term of appointment of not more than five years, with the possibility of re-appointment after that period.

The present chief inspector, Chris Woodhead, applied for the post through open competition and was appointed following consideration of the applicants by a selection board. The board was chaired by the first civil service commissioner. The appointment is for five years from 1 September 1994. A copy of the advertisement and job description for the post has been placed in the Library. The chief inspector's contract of employment is personal between him and the Department.

Grant-maintained Status

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received from *(a)* organisations representative of (i) parents and (ii) school governors, *(b)* denominational bodies, *(c)* organisations representing voluntary-aided schools and *(d)*other bodies, in respect of simplified procedures for obtaining grant-maintained school status without balloting parents of pupils currently in attendance at schools. [8252]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department's consultation paper, "Self-Government for Voluntary Aided Schools", set out a number of possibilities for giving voluntary-aided schools only easier access to self-government. My right hon. Friend received the following responses:

Body	*Number of responses*
(a) Organisations representing:	
(i) parents	2
(ii) school governors	6
(b) Denominational bodies	69
(c) Voluntary aided schools	1,632
(d) Other bodies (including local authority associations, local education authorities, teacher unions, bodies representing grant-maintained schools and former voluntary GM schools)	246

A summary of responses has been placed in the Library.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the TECs that have still to meet the criteria for the award of a three-year licence; and what percentage this represents. [8450]

Mr. Paice: As of today, 47 TECs in England have been awarded a three-year licence, which represents 64 per cent. of the network. TECs have until 1997 to meet the standards. The following TECs are still working towards the criteria:

Birmingham
Bolton Bury
Bradford and District
CAMBS (TEC)
CEWTEC
CILNTEC
ELTEC (East Lancashire)
Essex
Greater Peterborough
Hampshire
Heart of England
Kent
LAWTEC
Manchester
Merseyside
METROTEC (Wigan)
North West London
North London
North Yorkshire
Northamptonshire
Oldham
Sandwell
St Helens Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise
Surrey
Sussex Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise
Wight Training and Enterprise Council
Wiltshire

Many of these TECs are close to completing the process and I expect shortly to make further announcements of TECs to be awarded licences.

Training, North-West

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much money in *(a)* cash terms *(b)* real terms at 1991–92 prices her Department provided of training in the north-west region in each year from 1990–91 to 1993–94; and how

much money has been allocated for training in the north-west in 1995–96. [7652]

Mr. Paice: There are no consistent figures available for all the years requested owing to changes in regional boundaries and the setting up of the Government office for Merseyside.

In the first year of the present structure—1994–95—the amount spent on training in the north-west was £136.25 million.

For 1995–96, the Government office for the north-west has been allocated £169.826 million to spend on training. This does not include training initiatives run at a national level which cannot be disaggregated to a regional level.

WALES

Apprenticeships

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many apprentices under the new apprenticeship scheme have received bursaries; and what proportion this represents of the total number. [7746]

Mr. Richards: A total of 498 young people started modern apprenticeships in manufacturing engineering in Wales in 1994–95. Of these, 188 or 37.75 per cent. were in receipt of a bursary. A total of 1,780 young people have commenced modern apprenticeships so far in 1995–96. Of these, 75 or 4.2 per cent. are in receipt of a bursary.

Bursaries are available, for the first year of training only, to young people following modern apprenticeships in manufacturing engineering who are attending college on a full-time basis and who are non-employed.

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library a copy of "The Bay Study—A Strategy for Water Uses" report of Cardiff Bay development corporation. [7965]

Mr. Hague: A water use strategy for the bay is an operational matter for the corporation and will emerge from discussions with the local authorities, other public bodies and possible users.

Home Insulation

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many homes he expects to be insulated under the energy efficiency scheme in the next financial year; and how many homes were insulated under the scheme in 1994. [7816]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: No separate estimates are produced for Wales. The home energy efficiency scheme is run on a Great Britain basis and 450,000 homes received grants in 1994–95. The Government expect a further 600,000 to be given in 1995–96.

Cancer Patients

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many patients were diagnosed as suffering from cancer in each health authority and for Wales as a whole for each of the last available three years, expressing each figure as a percentage of the corresponding population. [8086]

Mr. Richards *[holding answer 10 January 1996]:* The information is given in the following table:

Number of newly registered cancers

	Clwyd	*East Dyfed*	*Gwent*	*Gwynedd*	*Mid Glamorgan*	*Powys*	*South Glamorgan*	*West Glamorgan*	*Pembrokeshire*	*Wales*
1988	2,447	1,490	2,255	1,416	2,560	593	1,893	2,196	624	15,474
1989	2,463	1,273	2,231	1,228	2,427	576	1,947	1,967	657	14,769
1990	2,334	1,317	2,120	1,572	2,863	468	2,115	1,753	568	15,110

Newly registered cancers as a percentage of population

	Clwyd	*East Dyfed*	*Gwent*	*Gwynedd*	*Mid Glamorgan*	*Powys*	*South Glamorgan*	*West Glamorgan*	*Pembrokeshire*	*Wales*
1988	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.5
1989	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.5
1990	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.7	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5

Source:
Wales Cancer Registry.

Nursing and Midwifery Students

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many pre-registration nursing and midwifery students commenced training as initial entrants by means of *(a)* salaried student places, *(b)* Project 2000 and *(c)* undergraduate study, for each of the last five years; [8352]

(2) how many pre-registration nursing and midwifery students who commenced training as initial entrants by means of *(a)* salaried student places, *(b)* Project 2000 and *(c)* undergraduate study, gave up their courses for each year of training for each of the last five years; [8358]

(3) how many pre-registration nursing and midwifery students who commenced training as initial entrants by means of *(a)* salaried student places, *(b)* Project 2000 and *(c)* undergraduate study, (i) qualified and (ii) registered with the UKCC, for each of the last five years; [8357]

(4) how many pre-registration nursing and midwifery

students who commenced training as initial entrants by means of *(a)* salaried student places, *(b)* Project 2000 and *(c)* undergraduate study, gave up their training in (i) the first year, (ii) the second year and (iii) the third year, for each of the last five years. [8359]

Mr. Richards *[holding answer 10 January 1996]:* Information in the form requested relating to salaried students and undergraduate students is not available centrally. The available information is given in the following table.

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Project 2000					
Commenced training as initial entrants	100	987	793	656	737
of which:					
gave up in first year	30	93	47	59	n/a
gave up in second year	4	67	88	n/a	n/a
gave up in third year	3	72	n/a	n/a	n/a
qualified	63	755	n/a	n/a	n/a
Midwifery students[1]					
Commenced training	n/a	8	12	12	12
Qualified	n/a	n/a	n/a	8	12

[1] Pre-registration students undertaking a three-year course.
n/a—not available.

Work Force Planning

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what studies his Department has undertaken into work force planning in the last five years. [8354]

Mr. Richards *[holding answer 10 January 1996]:* Work force planning information is collected for certain non-medical and dental staff groups in the NHS on an annual basis. To reduce the burden on the service the information requested centrally was reduced considerably in 1995. Only information which enables decisions on student intake numbers to be made for those staff groups planned and funded centrally is now collected.

Nurses

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total number of second level registered nurses; and how many are currently undertaking training to convert to first level registration. [8356]

Mr. Richards *[holding answer 10 January 1996]:* This information is not held centrally.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the number of nurses working in *(a)* private nursing homes, *(b)* private hospitals, *(c)* local authorities, *(d)* private residential homes, *(e)* the armed forces, *(f)* the prison service, *(g)* the occupational health service, *(h)* private industry, *(i)* self-employment and *(j)* any other categories; and if he will express the figures in terms of (i) total numbers and (ii) whole time equivalents. [8351]

Mr. Richards *[holding answer 10 January 1996]:* Information is not available centrally for all categories requested. The available information, which relates to staff with a nursing qualification, is given in the following table. In addition, there were 24,728 whole-time equivalent staff in the nursing and midwifery group in the NHS at 30 September 1995. This figure excludes pre-registration learner nurses and any staff with a nursing qualification not working in the nursing and midwifery group but includes auxiliary staff within the group who do not have a nursing qualification.

Category	*Number*	*Whole-time equivalent*
Private nursing homes (at 31 March 1995)	3,833	2,687
Private hospitals and clinics (at 31 March 1995)	280	253
Armed forces (at 1 December 1995)[1]	9	n/a
Prison service (at 31 December 1995)[2]	14	n/a
General Practitioner support staff (at 1 October 1994)	n/a	611

[1] Data obtained from the Ministry of Defence. [2] Data obtained from the Home Office.
n/a - not available.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how he intends to estimate demand for nurses from the non-NHS sector; and how this information will be used to regulate the supply of nursing students. [8353]

Mr. Richards *[holding answer 10 January 1996]:* Nurse training numbers are based on the requirement for newly qualified nurses identified in trusts' annual workforce plans. Allowance is also made for additional nurses working in the independent sector and with general practitioners.

To estimate demand outside the NHS, private hospitals, nursing homes and HM prisons are invited to provide information on their novice recruit requirements as part of the NHS Wales work force planning cycle.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales by what means he assesses the demand for conversion courses for second level registered nurses. [8355]

Mr. Richards *[holding answer 10 January 1996]:* The demand for conversion courses for second level registered nurses is assessed by the trust which employs the nurses.

Housing Revenue Account Subsidy

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he will reach his decisions on housing revenue account subsidy for 1996–97. [9497]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: We have decided to confirm the proposals which were set out in the answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney) on 28 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *600*. These included an average guideline rent increase of 92p per dwelling per week and per dwelling management and maintenance allowance to be kept at broadly the same as in 1995–96. The other proposals, including one to limit rent rebate subsidy, are also confirmed with minor adjustments.

Tables setting out each authority's rent guideline and management and maintenance allowance for 1996–97 have been placed in the Library of the House.

DEFENCE

Mr. Fouad Makhzoumi

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the occasions since 1979 on which he, his predecessors or officials of his Department have met Mr. Fouad Makhzoumi; what was the subject of each such meeting; and if he will make a statement. [7802]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I have nothing to add to the replies which my predecessor gave to the hon. Members for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) and for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) on 24 April 1995, *Official Report*, columns *394* and *396*.

Mobile Phones

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many mobile phones have been supplied to his Department in each of the last eight years; and in each of those years how many different suppliers were involved. [8035]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Following the introduction of the Department's new management strategy in 1991, responsibility for the procurement of mobile phones was disaggregated to local budget holders. No central records are held and information could be produced only at disproportionate cost. I shall write to the hon. Member regarding the position prior to 1991.

Mutual Defence Agreement

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are to amend the 1958 United States-United Kingdom mutual defence agreement to allow greater nuclear co-operation between Britain and France before the next amendment conference in 2005. [8265]

Mr. Arbuthnot: None.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if an office has been established for the purpose of co-ordinating Anglo-French nuclear co-operation similar to the existing atomic co-ordinating office, established to facilitate the 1958 US-UK mutual defence agreement. [8271]

Mr. Arbuthnot: No.

Nuclear Weapons (France)

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy that no French Government officials work at, or use, the facilities at the atomic weapons establishment. [8273]

Mr. Arbuthnot: No. Such a policy would be contrary to the Government's aim of deepening defence nuclear co-operation between the United Kingdom and France.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions there have been with the United States on the extent to which Britain can assist France in its nuclear weapons design, development and production programme. [8275]

Mr. Arbuthnot: We hold regular discussions with both the United States and France on a range of issues related to nuclear weapons.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assistance is *(a)* being given and *(b)* planned to be given to the French Government to assist in the construction of PALEN. [8266]

Mr. Arbuthnot: It is not our practice to reveal such details.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what procedures are in place to facilitate Anglo-French nuclear co-operation; [8267]

(2) what assistance is *(a)* being given or *(b)* planned to be given to the French Government to assist them in developing the facilities and equipment necessary for computer simulation and above ground experiments in respect of nuclear testing. [8268]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I have nothing to add to the answer I gave to the hon. Member on 16 October 1995, *Official Report*, column *37*.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if any memoranda of understanding have *(a)* been negotiated and *(b)* are currently under negotiation or consideration to formalise aspects of Anglo-French nuclear co-operation; [8284]

(2) if he will list all treaties and memoranda of understanding which currently exist between Britain and France with regard to nuclear co-operation. [8272]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I have nothing to add to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) on 24 October 1995, *Official Report*, column *587*.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions in the last five years French Government officials have visited a Untied Kingdom atomic weapons establishment. [8274]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I have nothing to add to the answers I gave the hon. Member on 16 October 1995 *Official Report*, column *37*, and to the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) on 31 October 1995, *Official Report*, columns, *155–56*.

British Aerospace

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what payments his Department has received in the last five years from British Aerospace for services

provided to British Aerospace; and what services were provided. [7603]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* This is a matter for the chief executive of the agency concerned. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from M. A. Rowe to Mrs. Ann Clwyd, dated 11 January 1996:

You asked the Secretary of State for Defence what payments his Department has received in the last five years from British Aerospace for services provided to British Aerospace, and what services were provided. As Chief Executive of the Defence Bills Agency I have been asked to reply.

The value of payments received from a customer is commercially sensitive information and therefore cannot be divulged.

Our payment records for British Aerospace, or indeed any customer, detail invoice number and value. In order to ascertain the type of supply or service covered each invoice would need to be retrieved and examined. Due to the level of business we have with British Aerospace this information could only be provided at disproportionate cost. However, examples, of the goods and services covered by the invoices are the provision of training, sale and loan of equipment, and levies due in respect of commercial sales.

I am sorry I cannot be more helpful.

Services Bandsmen

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many bandsmen *(a)* there are currently and *(b)* there were in 1990 in each of the services regular bands and in each band in the Territorial Army. [7984]

Mr. Soames: The breakdown of established figures for bandsmen for the three services, including the Territorial Army, is shown in the table.

	1996	*1990*
Navy (RM)	227	377
Army (Reg)	1,162	1,991
Army (TA)	864	992
RAF	206	244

The reorganisation of regular Army bands over the last three years has resulted in a reduction from 69 to 30 bands. Fifty seven bands which existed in 1990 no longer exist, and 18 new bands have been created. In 1990, 43 bands were established with 22 bandsmen, 14 with 34, three with 35, five with 49 and one with 30. There were an additional 25 staff. There are now 22 bands with 35 bandsmen and eight with 49.

The reorganisation process in the other two services and the TA has not been so dramatic. Comparative figures for 1990 and 1996 are shown in the tables:

Royal marines

	Number
1996	
RM Band Portsmouth	70
RM Band Plymouth	43
Commando Training Centre RM Band	44
RM Band Scotland	44
Britannia Royal Naval College Band	26
Total	227
1990	
Royal Marine School of Music Staff Band	65
CinCNAVHOME Band	65
CinCFLEET Band	65
Commando Forces Band	65
Flag Officer Portsmouth Band	41
FOSNI Band	41
Britannia Royal Naval College Band	35
Total	377

Royal Air Force

Band	*1996*	*1990*
Western	36	42
College	50	37
Regiment	40	41
Germany	0	40
Salon Orchestra	7	7
Central	65	69
HQ Musical Services	8	8
Total	206	244

Territorial Army

	Total
1996	
24 Bands, (all at 35 person strength). 24 other permanent staff	864
1990	
24 Bands (22 at strength of 31, one at 41, one at 55). 120 juniors and 24 other permanent staff	922

Procurement Executive

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the estimated *(a)* costs and *(b)* savings to public expenditure by financial year in respect of the establishment of the new building for the Procurement Executive at Abbey Wood, Bristol. [8199]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The estimated works cost of the Abbey Wood development, inclusive of site acquisition, construction, fitting out, professional works management fees and VAT, is £254.1 million at 1993 prices—£273.4 million at 1995 prices. Expenditure on works is estimated to be complete by the financial year 1998–99, allowing for the payment of retentions covering warranty and defect liability periods. The associated direct relocation cost, inclusive of staff relocation costs, removals, recommissioning of transferred IT systems and buy-out of London weighting allowance, is estimated at £79.8 million at 1993 prices—£85.5 million at 1995 prices—with the bulk of expenditure estimated to be completed by the financial year 2000–01 allowing for detached duty and housing cost allowances.

The net savings to the defence budget supported by the establishment of the new headquarters at Abbey Wood, Bristol for the Procurement Executive on completion of collocation are estimated at £86 million at 1993 prices—£92 million at 1995 prices—in the financial year 1997–98 rising to £105 million at 1993 prices, £113 million at 1995 prices, by the financial year 2004–05, and continuing annually thereafter.

When other exchequer costs and benefits are taken into account, and subject to finalisation of plans for the re-use or disposal of existing accommodation, the Department estimates the net savings to public expenditure are estimated at £67 million at 1993 prices—£72 million at 1995 prices—in the financial year 1997–98 rising to £94 million at 1993 prices, £101 million at 1995 prices, by the financial year 2004–05, and continuing annually thereafter.

Post project evaluation will be carried out by early 1997 to assess the extent to which estimated savings are being achieved.

Porton Down (Experiments)

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) on how many occasions studies involving service volunteers at Porton Down started without the permission of the Committee on the Safety of Human Experiments or the Independent Ethics Committee; and if the Committee on the Safety of Human Experiments included members who were not on the staff or Porton Down; [7309]

(2) what information has been kept on the register of work maintained by the Committee on the Safety of Human Experiments described in his answer of 6 July, *Official Report*, column *369*; when this register was set up and whether it is still kept; where the register is kept; who has access to the register; whether any part of the register is unclassified; and whether the register is available to be consulted by service volunteers who have taken part in the service volunteers programme. [7310]

Mr. Soames: These matters are for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 11 January 1996:

Your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence asking for further details about the register of work maintained by the Committee on the Safety of Human Experiments (COSHE) mentioned in my letter to you of 6 July 1995 (Official Report, column 369) and on how many occasions studies were started involving service volunteers without permission of the committee have been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes CBDE as one of its divisions. I am replying to both questions in this letter.

The register referred to in my answer of 6th July comprises of a list of the study protocols approved by the Committee for the Safety of Human Experiments (COSHE) since its inception. It is a classified document held in the archives of the Medical Countermeasure Centre at CBDE Porton Down. Access is limited to those managing the Service Volunteer Programme.

Since their inception no studies have ever been undertaken without the consent of either the COSHE or the Independent Ethics Committee. The COSHE was a committee of Porton Down medical practitioners and sometimes including external experts.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when the Chemical Defence Establishment at Porton Down started its policy of providing details, if requested, of the studies in which a service volunteer participated to medical practitioners who are responsible for the medical care of the individual concerned; what details are currently provided; and, since this policy began, whether the individuals concerned have always been allowed to see these details if the medical practitioner wished to show such details to the individual; [7294]

(2) if volunteers can inspect or obtain copies of contents of the paper folder referred to in his answer 18 July, *Official Report*, column *1174*, containing details of their participation in the service volunteers programme at the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down; if this paper folder contains laboratory reports and scientific data about the experiments in which they participated; and when the establishment started the practice of maintaining paper folders on each volunteer; [7311]

(3) if all service volunteers in the service personnel programme at the Chemical Defence Establishment at Porton Down since 1965 have been informed of the name of the chemical or chemical agent which was being tested on them before the test started. [7305]

Mr. Soames: These matters are for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 11 January 1996:

Your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence asking for further details of the information contained in the paper folders, mentioned in my letter to you of 18 July 1995 (Official Report, column 1174), relating to service volunteers at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment (CBDE), Porton Down; what information was released to volunteers and their medical practitioners; and whether volunteers were informed of the substances being tested on them have been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Defence Research and Evaluation Agency (DERA) which includes CBDE as one of its divisions. I am answering all three questions in this letter.

The paper folders to which I referred in my letter of 18 July have been used at CBDE Porton Down since 1980 and contain details of medical examinations conducted on each volunteer as they join and leave CDBE. Access to this information is now in accordance with the 'Access to Health Records Act 1990' which gives patients the right to see or obtain copies of their health records compiled after 1 November 1991. In fact, it has always been CBDE policy to release medical details to medical practitioners on request. Experimental data and study details are held separately and this information is also usually available to medical practitioners on request. Medical practitioners are at liberty to show any of this information to their patients.

Volunteers at Porton Down have always, as a matter of course, been informed of the name, nature and possible short term outcome of any chemical or chemical agent used in studies in which they are going to participate. The only exception was in studies using psychotomimetric drugs, such as the trials involving LSD in the

1960s, where it was considered that to do so might prejudice the scientific integrity of the study. Those volunteers were, however, informed of the nature of the drug and the type of short term effects it might induce. Once any volunteer has been given this information they are given time to consider and ask further questions before proceeding with the trial. They are free then, and at any subsequent time during the study, to withdraw without giving a reason. These safeguards have been enshrined in the Nuremburg Code since the 1940s but had, to the best of our knowledge, always been the practice at Porton Down.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down recruited volunteers for its service volunteers programme. [7297]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 11 January 1996:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking how the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment (CBDE) at Porton Down recruits volunteers for the service volunteer programme has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes CBDE as one of its divisions.

CBDE recruits volunteers for the research programme by placing its requirements in Defence Council Instructions, a form of internal notices, which are issued to all military units. Service personnel wishing to volunteer apply to their unit's administrative staff who pass the details to CBDE.

I hope this information is useful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service volunteers were involved in the trials to determine the dispersion of chemical agents carried out in the underground sampling chambers at the Chemical Defence Establishment at Porton Down; which chemical agents were used in trials in these underground chambers; if these underground chambers were used for any other purposes; and in what year these underground chambers were last used. [7307]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 11 January 1996:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking how many service volunteers were involved in the trials to determine the dispersion of chemical agents carried out in the underground sampling chambers at the former Chemical Defence Establishment at Porton Down, which agents were used in these trials, what other studies were conducted in the underground chambers and in what year they were last used has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment (CBDE) as one of its divisions.

No service volunteers have been involved in the studies conducted using the underground sampling chambers at CBDE Porton Down. These chambers, which were originally water reservoirs for the now demolished farmhouse known as Old Lodge, were last used in the early 1960s for trials with riot control agents such as CS.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to what extent tests and studies involving service personnel in the service volunteer programme at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down since 1965 have conformed to the Nuremburg code and Helsinki declarations on medical research on humans in respect of compensation; and if he will make a statement. [7308]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 11 January 1996:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking whether tests and studies involving service personnel in the service volunteer programme at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment (CBDE) at Porton Down since 1965 have conformed to the Nuremburg Code and Helsinki Declaration on medical research on humans with regard to the principle that persons should be compensated for any injury or loss caused by the experiments has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes CBDE as one of its divisions.

All volunteer studies conducted at CBDE since 1965 have been carried out according to a written protocol approved by the Committee for the Safety of Human Experiments (COSHE), a committee of Porton Down medical practitioners and sometimes including external experts. Since 1991 protocols have been formally submitted to an independent Ethics Committee for approval before the studies begin. Any member of HM Armed Forces who suffers an injury that is attributable to service (including participation in studies at CBDE Porton Down) would be entitled to a War Pension. Claims for compensation, other than for a War Pension would be considered on a case by case basis. Compensation would be awarded, if appropriate, following a full examination of the facts.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what rules govern participation by service personnel who have recently given blood in the service volunteers programme at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down; what is the reason for this policy; and when it was introduced. [7301]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 11 January 1996:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what rules govern the participation by service personnel who have recently given blood in the service volunteer programme at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down, what is the reason for this policy and when it was introduced has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes CBDE as one of its divisions.

It is CBDE's policy that those who participate in the Volunteer Programme must be medically fit to take part in the studies required. It is therefore part of the procedures for acceptance onto the programme to conduct a medical examination of the volunteer.

When a study will involve taking multiple blood samples the medical examination includes a red blood cell count. If this is not within acceptable parameters (perhaps as the result of recent blood donation) the volunteer is not accepted for the study. Trials since the early 1940s have involved multiple blood sampling and we believe that the policy of using red blood cell count as part of the acceptance procedure for this type of study has existed since this date.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what details of experiments are given to hon. Members who write to the Chemical Defence Establishment at Porton Down requesting information about such experiments on behalf of individuals who have taken part in those experiments during the service volunteers programme; and if such hon. Members receive more detailed information of such experiments than the patient's medical practitioners. [7356]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 11 January 1996:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking whether the information given to honourable members about the service volunteer programme at the Chemical Defence Establishment at Porton Down is more detailed than that given to the volunteers' medical practitioners has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes CBDE as one of its divisions.

It has been CBDE's policy for many years to provide details of the type of studies in which a volunteer participated to an honourable member requesting this information on behalf of a constituent. The information provided to the honourable member is similar to that provided to the volunteer's medical practitioner with the exception that any medical details regarding the individual are provided solely to their medical practitioner and not to a third party such as the honourable member.

I hope this information is helpful.

SCOTLAND

Dounreay (Leukaemia)

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what investigation is being made currently into leukaemia clusters around Dounreay. [7253]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 20 December 1995]:* No studies relating solely to the area around Dounreay are currently being carried out but monitoring of the incidence of leukaemia in the area continues. Other relevant studies include the Scottish contribution to the Government-funded childhood cancer case control study. Linked to a parallel study in England and Wales, this is the largest investigation yet undertaken into the causation of childhood leukaemia and will cover all cases of childhood cancer registered in Scotland in the period 1991–94.

Water Rates

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what basis the water authorities in Scotland will calculate the revenue which the unitary councils will be expected to collect in water rates. [4444]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* The three new public water sewerage authorities will set charges for their services in charges schemes for their areas. The unitary councils will be required to demand and recover unmeasured domestic water and sewerage charges payable for these services under a charges scheme less any reduction to such charges for which the Secretary of State may provide in exercise of his powers under section 81 of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements he is proposing in respect of the liability of the new unitary councils in Scotland to collect water rates. [4442]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 6 December 1995]:* My right hon. Friend will make an order under section 79 of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994 requiring local authorities to demand and recover domestic unmeasured water and sewerage charges on behalf of the new water and sewerage authorities.

Oil Spillages

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many oil spillages have been detected around the coast of Scotland in each of the last three years; how many sea birds and mammals were affected; and how many prosecutions were entered against those causing the spillages. [7656]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate advises that in each of the last three years for which complete figures are available there have been the following number of prosecutions:

1992: One

1993: Four

1994: Five

As the number of oil spillages detected in Scottish waters is an operational matter for the Coastguard Agency, I have asked my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport to ask the chief executive of that agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Mr. Tony Banks, dated 9 January 1996:

The Minister for Transport has been asked by the Secretary of State for Scotland to reply to part of your recent Question about oil spillages around the cost of Scotland and the affect on sea birds and mammals. I have been asked to reply as the query deals with a matter for which I have responsibility as Chief Executive of the Coastguard Agency.

In the three years period 1992 to 1994, there have been 477 reported oil pollution incidents in Scottish waters. Of these, 144 were reported in 1992, 178 were reported in 1993 and 155 were reported in 1994.

In 1992 238 birds were affected by oil around the coast of Scotland. During the BRAER spill in January 1993, some 1500 to 1600 birds of all species were found dead, according to the report by the Ecological Steering Group on the Oil Spill in Shetland (ESGOSS) into the Environmental Impact of the Wreck of the

BRAER. The ESGOSS report does not attribute any mammal deaths directly to the effects of the BRAER spill. During 1994 366 birds were affected by oil around the Scottish coastline.

Mr. J. Easson and Sons

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what factors have led to his Department's delay in responding to inquiries made by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West in respect of Mr. J. Easson and Sons. [7747]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* My noble Friend the Minister for Agriculture in Scotland wrote to the hon. Member on 5 January 1996 in relation to her inquiries on behalf of Mr. J. Easson and Sons. This followed lengthy and detailed discussions between the UK Agriculture Departments and the Intervention Board executive agency.

Urban Programme

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the urban programme will continue as a specific grant in 1996–97; and when he will make an announcement about its future. [7761]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The urban programme will continue as a specific grant in 1996–97 although, as normal, grant payments will largely be devoted to reimbursing, in arrears, expenditure already incurred on approved projects. Views on the future of the urban programme as a specific grant were invited in the consultation paper "Devolution of Power to Councils" which was published on 29 December. The consultation period will end on 15 March and my right hon. Friend will announce his decision once he has given careful consideration to the responses received.

Mobile Phones

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many mobile phones have been supplied to his Department in each of the last eight years; and in each of those years how many different suppliers were involved. [8039]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is set out in the table:

Year	*Number of mobile phones*	*Number of suppliers*
1988	7	2
1989	21	2
1990	29	2
1991	23	3
1992	65	2
1993	54	1
1994	37	2
1995	72	3

Nursery Schools

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by new local authority area, the number of nursery schools currently provided by local authorities. [8183]

Mr. Raymond Robertson *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* The information is in table 6.1 of the new councils statistical report prepared by the Scottish Office and published by the Government statistical service in May 1995.

Live Animal Transport

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from *(a)* individual farmers and *(b)* farming organisations about the practical consequences of implementing EC directive 95/29 on livestock transport in sparsely populated areas. [8201]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Of the 91 formal responses from organisations in Scotland to the consultation paper issued in October last year on the implementation of EC directive 95/29, 36 have offered specific comments on livestock transport in sparsely populated areas. These comprise 29 responses from farming organisations and seven from individuals who are, or are associated with, farmers.

BBC Transmitter System

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what grant assistance will be available from local enterprise companies in Scotland following the proposed privatisation of the BBC transmitter system for the construction of boosters. [7998]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 10 January 1996]:* It is the responsibility of individual local enterprise companies to make decisions on applications for grant assistance for projects in their area. Any applications involving booster construction would have to be considered against the local enterprise company operating guidelines laid down by Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the overall resources available and their relative priority against other projects.

Scottish Ambulance Service

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements exist to provide for the public accountability of the Scottish ambulance service for its management policies and practices and to ensure its employees are not subject to victimisation. [7999]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 10 January 1996]:* The Scottish Ambulance Service NHS trust is a self-governing body with its own board of directors. The trust has freedom to organise its affairs subject to the legal framework within which it operates, the guidelines laid down by the Scottish Office and the contracts negotiated with purchasers.

The trust chairman and his board are accountable to the Secretary of State via the management executive of the NHS in Scotland.

A copy of the Scottish ambulance service's policy and procedure for the resolution of differences between the trust and its employees has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what instructions, and on what dates, were issued to the Central Legal Office by the Scottish ambulance service in respect of the case of Mr. D. Allan Bruce of Kinlochiervie; and what action the Central Legal Office took in response to each instruction. [8285]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 10 January 1996]:* I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a signed copy of the letter in the Library of the House.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made in implementing the recommendations made by the efficiency scrutiny of the Scottish Office on sponsored non-departmental public bodies. [9474]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The results of the efficiency scrutiny of my Department's sponsorship of non-departmental public bodies were announced to the House on 19 October 1994, *Official Report*, columns *285–86*. The recommendations included new training and development programmes for staff involved in sponsorship; the provision of more advice and assistance to sponsor staff; and action programmes for putting strategic frameworks into place for each NDPB as appropriate.

I am pleased to announce that the recommendations contained in the scrutiny report have been achieved ahead of target and copies of the implementation report have been placed in the Library of the House.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Loss of Benefit

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what protection is afforded to people who lose social security benefits because of a change in legislation. [4096]

Mr. Burt: When there is a change in legislation affecting people already in receipt of a specific social security benefit, the extent to which, if at all, transitional protection arrangements will be required depends on a number of circumstances, including the purpose and nature of the benefit in question, the likely needs of those in receipt of it who may be affected by the change, and what other help is available to meet those needs. Consequently, protection may not be available for every beneficiary against all changes. Where protection is given sometimes it is for rights or concessions awarded to existing claimants, and sometimes for existing amounts of money paid to them. Protection against the effect of a change in legislation can also be offered by means of a lengthy period of introduction of the new rules, or by announcement of the change many months ahead of the date on which it is due to come into effect.

For such changes in the law there are procedures for consultation with the Social Security Advisory Committee—and, where appropriate, with the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council or Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board—and, concerning housing benefit and council tax benefits, with organisations representing the local authorities.

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what provision will be made on the proposed social security legislation to protect claimants who have made their plans on the basis of the benefit they would have received under the existing legislation. [4117]

Mr. Burt: The need for transitional protection is considered in accordance with the individual circumstances of proposed policy changes. In announcing proposals on 29 November, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made it clear that the proposal to limit housing benefit for some people under 25 living in private rented accommodation will not affect those in receipt of housing benefit prior to January 1996, which is 92 per cent. of the total, unless they change their address or have a break in entitlement of more than four weeks. Also, those who make a new claim between 2 January 1996 and 7 October 1996 will not be affected by the new rules until the date of the first review of their claim after 7 October 1996. The announcement of the proposal to bring the mobility component of disability living allowance into line with similar benefits which are withdrawn during hospital stays also made it clear that those who have been in hospital for 12 months or more, for example, will continue to receive the mobility component at an amount equivalent to the lower rate. Also mobility agreements, for a car or wheelchair, funded by the mobility component of disability living allowance, which are current when a person enters hospital will continue for the full term of the agreement.

Child Support Agency

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the amount of down time recorded for the Child Support Agency's operational accounting system in each months since April 1993. [4077]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is not available in the format requested. The available information is in the table.

Period	*Service availability percentage*
3 August 1994–9 August 1994	99.8
15 August 1994–21 August 1994	97.6
28 August 1994–4 September 1994	99.6
5 September 1994–11 September 1994	99.6
12 September 1994–18 September 1994	99.9
19 September 1994–25 September 1994	99.6
14 November 1994–20 November 1994	99.6
28 November 1994–4 December 1994	99.6
9 January 1995–15 January 1995	99.2
6 March 1995–12 March 1995	99.7
27 March 1995–2 April 1995	99.8
12 June 1995–18 June 1995	99.7
26 June 1995–2 July 1995	98.9
31 July 1995–6 August 1995	99.6
7 August 1995–13 August 1995	99.7
14 August 1995–20 August 1995	99.8
6 November 1995–12 November 1995	99.7

The operation accounting system went live on 7 June 1994.

Pensioners (Benefit Take-up)

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the number and proportion of pensioners in the United Kingdom who do not take up *(a)* income support, *(b)* housing benefit and *(c)* council tax benefit to which they are entitled; and what is the estimated value of the unclaimed benefits. [7646]

Mr. Heald: The most recent information is for 1993–94 and applies to Great Britain.

The latest figures for take-up are contained in the "Income Related Benefits Estimates of Take Up in 1993/94" which was published on 15 December 1995, copies of which are in the Library.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the mean and median periods of time in weeks that people who have submitted an appeal against the decision by the Benefit Agency to stop their incapacity benefit have to wait before a hearing is held. [7795]

Mr. Burt: The information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Executive Agencies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if answers sent to hon. Members in reply to parliamentary questions by the head of executive agencies in his Department are *(a)* seen, *(b)* approved and *(c)* amended by him before they are sent; and if he will identify such letters to which amendments by him have been made in 1994–95.

Mr. Burt: Parliamentary questions are passed to the head of an executive agency for reply when the matter is one delegated to him or her under the agency framework document. The relevant Minister sees a copy of the reply before it is sent, but would not normally intervene in operational matters. No record is kept of any amendments suggested by Ministers.

Retirement Pensions

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the pension for *(a)* a couple and *(b)* an individual in 1979; and what it would currently be if the pension had been uprated in line with (i) inflation and (ii) earnings. [8080]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table.

	November 1979 £	*April 1995 (if increased in line with RPI) £*	*April 1995 (if increased in line with average earnings) £*
Standard rate cat. A RP for a single person	23.30	56.95	77.75
Standard RP for a married couple	37.30	91.15	124.65

1. Calculations are rounded to the nearest 5p at each uprating date.
2. Increases in RPI are calculated using the retail prices index (all items) as supplied by Central Statistical Office.
3. Earnings increases are calculated using the average earnings index (whole economy unadjusted) as published by the Central Statistical Office.

Poverty

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent assessment he has made of the extent of poverty in the United Kingdom. [8082]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: There is no simple or meaningful way to define or measure poverty. Income is not always an accurate guide to living standards, especially among households in the lowest income deciles.

National Insurance

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to change the means of levying national insurance. [7100]

Mr. Heald: None.

Equal Treatment

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list each form of institutional discrimination listed by his Department between men and women for social security benefit purposes; what is the approximate number of claimants affected by each different form and the approximate annual cost of removing each form if there were no retrospective effect of removal; and what assessment he has made as to what extent each form is necessarily and objectively to the difference in pensionable age; and if he will make statement. [1080]

Mr. Heald *[holding answer 23 November 1995]:* The table sets out the different treatment of men and women in the social security system. These either relate to the differences in pensionable age or are otherwise considered to be permitted in law. Estimates of the financial effects of equalisation depend on the basis on which provisions are equalised.

The Pensions Act 1995 introduces further equalisation into the social security system linked to an equal state pension age. The financial implications of this Act are contained in the report by the Government Actuary on the financial provisions of the Bill on the national insurance fund, Cm 2714.

Benefit	*Description*
Unemployment benefit[1]	The maximum age for receipt is 65 for women, 70 for men. The age at which the benefit rate changes to the retirement pension rate is 60 for women, 65 for men.
Long-term incapacity benefit	The maximum age for receipt is 60 for women, 65 for men.
Short-term incapacity benefit	The maximum age for receipt is 65 for women, 70 for men. The

Benefit	*Description*
	age at which the benefit rate changes to the retirement pension rate is 60 for women, 65 for men.
Transitional invalidity allowance and related age addition to retirement pension[2]	The upper age limit for acquiring entitlement to the lower rate of allowance was 55 for women, 60 for men.
Widow's payment, widowed mother's allowance, widow's pension	Married women are entitled on widowhood where statutory conditions are satisfied. There are no equivalent benefits for men.
Category A retirement pension (own insurance)	The minimum age of entitlement is 60 for women, 65 for men. Women may defer their entitlement in order to receive increments between age 60 and 65; men between 65 and 70. Entitlement to retirement pension is calculated on a working life of 44 years for women, 49 for men.
Category B retirement pension (spouse's contributions	A woman must be aged 60 and over and (i) married to husband who is entitled to category A retirement pension, or (ii) widowed after age 60 and late husband satisfied contribution condition for category A retirement pension, or (iii) widowed before age 60 and in receipt of widow's pension at that age in consequence of husband's death. A man is entitled only where (i) both he and his late wife were over pensionable age when she died and (ii) she satisfied the contribution conditions for category A retirement pension.
Retirement pension—earnings-related additional pension (SERPS) 1986 Act changes to SERPS calculation for people reaching pensionable age from 6 April 1999 affect men born after 5 April 1934 and women born after 5 April 1939	
Graduated retirement benefit	The minimum age of entitlement is 60 for women, 65 for men. The amount of graduated contributions paid to obtain one graduated retirement benefit "unit" was £9.00 for women, £7.50 for men.
Reduced earnings allowance[3]	Recipients transfer to retirement allowance at age 60 for women, 65 for men.
Increase of unemployment benefit or short-term incapacity benefit paid at the lower rate in respect of a dependent child. Child dependency increase are available for women from age 60, men from age 65.	
Increase of category A retirement pension for adult dependant. A woman claiming an adult dependency increase of retirement pension for a dependent husband has to satisfy the condition that she was entitled to an increase of unemployment benefit or incapacity benefit immediately before claiming her pension. There is no similar condition for a man claiming an increase of retirement pension for his wife.	
Child benefit	A wife or mother of the child(ren) has priority of entitlement over a husband or father.
Family credit	In couples cases the claim is made by the woman and any benefit paid to her.
Guardian's allowance	A wife has priority of entitlement over husband.

[1] Jobseeker's allowance will replace unemployment benefit in October 1996. JSA will cease at pension age. As pension ages are aligned under the 1995 Pensions Act, different treatment will be reduced.

[2] Invalidity addition was abolished from 13 April 1995 but continues in payment to former invalidity benefit recipients.

[3] Women aged 60 and over and men aged 65 and over before 10 April 1989 continue to receive a frozen rate of reduced earnings allowance.

Benefits Agency Medical Services

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of doctors who currently work for Benefits Agency medical services on a part-time basis have undertaken further education on clinical topics in the last year in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* England; and what percentage of this further education was related to mental illness. [6254]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Ron Davies, dated 10 January 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about what percentage of Doctors who currently work for Benefits Agency Medical Services (BAMS) on a part-time basis have undertaken further education on clinical topics in the last year in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* England; and what percentage of this further education was related to mental illness.

Information about the further education on clinical topics undertaken by BAMS Doctors is not available.

Fee paid Doctors are contracted on a self-employed basis and are paid hourly for a three and a half hour, half day session. All these Doctors, approved to apply the new medical test for Incapacity

Benefit, have received a flexible modular training course during the past year.

Twenty per cent of the modules are related to the assessment of mental health problems and the application of the mental health questionnaire for the medical test for Incapacity Benefit.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of Benefits Agency medical services doctors work for the BAMS *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time in (i) the United Kingdom, (ii) Wales and (iii) England. [6263]

Mr. Evans: The administration of the Benefits Agency medical services is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Ron Davies, dated 10 January 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about what percentage of Benefits Agency Medical Services (BAMS) Doctors work for the BAMS *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time in (i) the United Kingdom, (ii) Wales and (iii) England.

Details requested are outlined below. Both permanent and fixed term appointment Doctors are employed full time by the BAMS. You should know, however, that some Doctors employed on a permanent basis may also work part-time. Fee paid Doctors are contracted on a self-employed basis and are paid hourly for a three and a half hour, half day session.

Percentage

	Permanent/fixed term appointments	*Fee paid*
United Kingdom	16	84
Wales	18.55	81.45
England	14.80	85.20

I hope this reply is helpful.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list, by region, the total number of doctors employed *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part time by the Benefits Agency medical services; how many Benefits Agency medical services doctors in each region are aged (i) 65–70 years and (ii) over 70 years; and what are the terms of their Benefits Agency medical services contract. [6321]

Mr. Evans: The administration of the Benefits Agency medical services is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. William Etherington, dated 10 January 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will list, by region, the total number of Doctors employed (a) full-time and (b) part time by the Benefits Agency Medical Service (BAMS); how many BAMS Doctors in each region are aged (i) 65–70 years and (ii) over 70 years; and what are the terms of their BAMS contract.

Information that is available in the outlined in Appendix A.

Fee paid Doctors are contracted on a self-employed basis and are paid hourly for a three and half hour, half day session.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Appendix A: Number and location of doctors employed by the Benefits Agency medical services

Location	*Total number full-time employed doctors*	*Total number fee paid part-time doctors*	*Fee paid doctors aged 65–70*	*Fee paid doctors aged 70+*
Wales	27	144	39	10
Bootle	14	123	22	2
Manchester	12	142	25	3
Wembley	26	113	32	4
Bristol	14	90	17	1
Leeds	24	188	32	4
Newcastle	19	64	14	3
Glasgow	25	88	19	Nil
Edinburgh	23	83	15	Nil
Midlands	38	250	1	Nil
Sutton	32	118	28	3
Fylde DLA	12	Nil	Nil	Nil
Totals	266	1,403	244	30

These figures are provisional and subject to amendment.

Family Credit

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the backlog of family credit renewal claims awaiting processing during 1995; what change there has been in them in the last year and for what reasons; and what action is proposed to revise such backlog. [6317]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. David Nicholson, dated 10 January 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the backlog of Family Credit (FC) renewal claims awaiting processing during 1995; what change there has been in them in the last year and for what reasons; and what action is proposed to revise such backlog.

At 30 November 1994, there were 34,570 outstanding renewal claims and at 30 November 1995, this had reduced to 33,191. This figure has varied during the year from between 25,589 and 37,168.

When a customer wishes to renew entitlement to FC, a renewal claim is required. Such claims may be submitted up to four weeks prior to the expiry of the previous award. This four week period enables enquiries to be made without the customer suffering a gap in benefit payments.

The FC Unit expect to receive a total of 900,000 renewal claims in the current financial year. The number of renewal claims received does vary throughout the year with two peak renewal periods, March and September. The Secretary of State has set two demanding targets for the clearance of all claims, including renewal claims to FC. These are that 60% of claims be cleared within 13 working days and that 95% be cleared within 42 working days. The FC Unit has achieved these targets throughout the current financial year. At the end of November 1995, the clearance of renewal claims stands at 71.3% cleared within 13 days and 98.5% cleared within 42 days.

Management controls are in place to ensure that a high standard of service is maintained and that renewal claims to FC are decided as quickly as is possible.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of continuing medical education modules undertaken by all Benefits Agency medical services full-time doctors is dedicated to psychiatry and medical illness. [6272]

Mr. Evans: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Ron Davies, dated 10 January 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about what proportion of continuing medical education modules undertaken by all benefits Agency Medical Services (BAMS) full-time Doctors is dedicated to psychiatry and medical illness.

Approximately thirty per cent of the modules are devoted to psychiatric evaluation and assessment of effects of mental health problems.

A balance of the modules is devoted to disability awareness and advances in management and evaluation of commonly occurring or complex medical conditions.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Claimant Deaths

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the average length of time that elapses between the death of *(a)* a benefit claimant and *(b)* a pension claimant and the notification of the relevant benefit agency. [6269]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Jon Owen Jones, dated 10 January 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about what estimate he has made of the average length of time that elapses between the death of (a) a benefit and (b) a pension claimant and the notification of the relevant Benefit Agency (BA).

Statistics on the time that lapses between the death of a customer and the notification to the BA are not kept. Experience shows that in the event of a death, the BA is notified, in the majority of cases, directly by the next of kin, solicitor, executor or nursing home. The death is usually reported direct to the BA within a few days and the computer systems are updated immediately.

Once the relevant computer system has been updated any future payments will be suspended. The date of death is "broadcast" via the Departmental Central Index (DCI) to every other benefit system. This will automatically activate a suspension of future benefit payments, where appropriate, on those benefit systems.

As an additional safeguard, the Registrars pass details of the deaths, reported to them, to the Office of Population Censuses and Survey. The details are then transferred to a tape which is sent to the Contributions Agency. The details from this tape are passed to the DCI which then broadcasts to every benefit computer system. This process takes approximately [illegible] weeks.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 15 January 1996

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Central Office of Information

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) if all the functions of the Central Office of Information will be sold if it becomes privatised; and if he will make a statement; [8494]

(2) what negotiations are being carried out in respect of privatising the Central Office of Information; and if he will make a statement. [8477]

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. Butler) on 23 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *235*, in which I confirmed that the Central Office of Information will continue as a next steps agency.

Open Government Code

Dr. Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will provide details of the publicity programme aimed at the general public designed to spread knowledge of the open government code; and how much newspaper advertising has been undertaken. [8558]

Mr. Willetts: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 9 January, *Official Report*, column *121*, setting out details of the publicity programme for the code. Paid newspaper advertising has not been used as part of the programme.

Departmental Running Costs

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is his estimate of the cost of running his departmental office, and that of his predecessor, for each year since 1990–91 including the current year, broken down into *(a)* telephone bills, *(b)* total staff costs, *(c)* press and communications, *(d)* entertainment, *(e)* alcoholic drinks, *(f)* non-alcoholic drinks, *(g)* stationery, *(h)* office refurbishment and *(i)* other. [6397]

Mr. Freeman: the table shows costs for the running of the OPS private offices since 1990–91 with an estimate for 1995–96.

	1990–91 £	*1991–92* £	*1992–93* £	*1993–94* £	*1994–95* £	*1995–96 (established)* £
Total staff costs	263,919	247,428	393,933	547,917	575,761	475,756
Entertainment	110	329	1,152	1,002	3,373	1,259
Stationery	641	1,774	3,863	2,262	8,386	30,193

Expenditure on the other items in each of the last five years is not collected in the format requested but is included in the running cost expenditure of my Department which was £64,646,000 in 1994–95[1]. Projections for 1995–96 are in line with overall expenditure for next year published in the Public Expenditure Survey statement.

[1] This includes the running costs for the Office of Science and Technology, now transferred to the Department of Trade and Industry.

Ministerial Travel and Accommodation Costs

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is his estimate of the total cost for himself and other departmental Ministers for each year since 1991–92, including the current year of *(a)* overseas travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers and their advisers, *(b)* car and chauffeuring costs of Ministers, *(c)* ministerial security costs and *(d)* domestic travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers. [6416]

Mr. Freeman: The total costs for these items for the Chancellor and the Parliamentary Secretary and the private offices are given in the table.

	1991–92 £	*1992–93* £	*1993–94* £	*1994–95* £	*1995–96 (est.)* £
Overseas travel and accommodation (Minister and advisers)	nil	10,432	30,710	17,700	65,000
Car and chauffeuring costs	56,869	122,734	194,460	138,936	114,561
Ministerial security costs	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
Domestic travel and accommodation (Minister and advisers)	48	17,473	9,898	7,210	9,100

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what legal costs arising from the Scott inquiry have been incurred by his Department on behalf of Ministers and ex-Ministers; and if he will name the individuals concerned; [8757]

(2) what legal costs arising from the Scott inquiry have been incurred by the Department on behalf of current and past *(a)* civil servants and *(b)* advisers and secondees. [8744]

Mr. Freeman: No legal costs have been incurred by my Department on behalf of Ministers, ex-Ministers, civil servants, former civil servants or other advisors or

secondees of my Department in connection with the Scott inquiry. The cost of any advice in connection with the Scott inquiry given by Government lawyers as part of their normal duties cannot be quantified.

Photocopiers

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 9 January, *Official Report*, column *121*, what factors led his Department to accept photocopiers on variable contracts of three, four and five years over and above the leasing costs; and what is the minimum contractual cost of using and maintaining *(a)* the 18 photocopiers on three-year contracts, *(b)* the three photocopiers on four-year contracts and *(c)* the four photocopiers on five-year contracts. [8920]

Mr. Willetts: The factors taken into account when deciding the length of contract include the size of the machine, the projected copy volumes and the need for flexibility in the light of changing circumstances.

The minimum total cost of leasing *(a)* the 18 photocopiers on three-year contracts is £36,806 per annum, *(b)* that of the three photocopiers on four-year contracts is £15,969 per annum and *(c)* that of the four photocopiers on five-year contracts is £3,315 per annum.

Cabinet Committees

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many times *(a)* the Ministerial Committee on the Environment, *(b)* the Ministerial Committee on Competitiveness and *(c)* the Ministerial Committee on Economic and Domestic Policy have met since 1 January 1995; [8670]

(2) how many papers have been placed before the Cabinet between 1 July and 31 December 1995; how many of these papers were accompanied by a statement of the likely environmental implications; and for each paper which had environmental implications statements which Government Department took the lead in preparing the paper. [8671]

The Deputy Prime Minister: "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" makes clear that papers or other information relating to the proceedings of Cabinet or Cabinet Committees are not normally made public, in order to protect the principle of collective responsibility. It also makes clear that the papers for the Cabinet and Cabinet Committees should, wherever appropriate, cover any significant costs or benefits to the environment.

Mobile Phones

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many mobile telephones were supplied to his Department in each of the last eight years; and in each year how many suppliers were involved. [9125]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service, *Official Report*, 9 January, column *121*.

HEALTH

Breast Cancer

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will launch a publicity campaign to raise the awareness of breast cancer in older women, with particular reference to breast screen tests; and if he will make a statement. [8428]

Mr. Horam: The national breast screening programme, with Age Concern, has launched an educational drive to inform women aged 65 and over of the importance of continued breast awareness and about their right to request breast screening every three years.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those health authorities who currently refuse to breast screen women aged 65 years and over. [8427]

Mr. Horam: There are no such authorities.

Hospital Closures

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will defer all further hospital closures, including those pending until alternative arrangements have been put in place for patient care with particular reference to elderly patients. [9154]

Mr. Horam: No. Decisions on hospital closures are primarily for local health authorities, and are referred to Ministers only where the community health council contests the proposed closure.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which trusts have been required by him to pay to central funds all or part of their reserve because they have had an excessive cash surplus; and what amounts were involved. [8731]

Mr. Horam: None.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which trusts have borrowed on an unguaranteed basis; and to what level in each year since their inception. [8713]

Mr. Horam: It is the responsibility of individual national health service trusts to secure best value for money from their borrowing. Information on trust borrowing on an unguaranteed basis is not available centrally.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what reports he has received from experiments undertaken on mice as to the cross-species movement of BSE and the possible barrier to the harming of human beings by infected poisons from animals; and if he will make a statement. [8695]

Mr. Horam: We are aware of the research currently being conducted by Professor John Collinge to investigate whether bovine spongiform encephalopathy, BSE, can be transmitted to mice which have been genetically engineered to carry the human prion protein. Recently published interim results show that, after inoculation with BSE infected material, such mice have failed to develop spongiform encephalopathy within the time taken by

similar mice following inoculation with Creuzfeldt-Jakob disease infected material. While this is encouraging, considerable further research is need before any firm conclusions can be drawn about the theoretical risk of BSE transmission to humans.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the allocations made to individual trusts to pursue private finance initiative bids. [9033]

Mr. Horam: National health service trusts develop outline business cases for capital investment at their own expense. Where an outline business case is approved, regional offices have discretion to allocate funds for development of the full business case for the investment, a process which includes exploring the potential for a private finance solution. The capital investment manual, copies of which are available in the Library, suggests a budget of around 1 per cent. of the estimated value of the capital investment for the preparation of the outline and full business cases, including any costs incurred in testing for private finance, as well as other costs, such as design work. Actual figures on amounts allocated to develop full business cases are not available centrally.

Health Authorities

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the health authorities in England in order of population. [8877]

Mr. Horam: The information is shown in the table. The table relates to current 1995–1996 district health—authority boundaries and is based upon the resident population estimates for mid-1994, the latest available.

District Health Authorities in England ranked in order of population

District Health Authority	*Estimated resident population mid-1994 (thousands)*
West Kent	963
Leicestershire	917
North Essex	873
Bristol and District	848
Wiltshire and Bath	771
Berkshire	768
South–east London	732
North Yorkshire	727
East Sussex	727
Leeds	725
West Sussex	720
South Essex	697
Dorset	672
South Cheshire	665
Buckinghamshire	660
Suffolk	649
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	649
Nottingham	636
Western Surrey	636
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	617
East Norfolk	611
Lincolnshire	606
North and Mid Hampshire	604
East London and the City	595
Northamptonshire	595
Oxfordshire	590
Plymouth and Torbay	586
South Staffordshire	583
East Kent	583
North Birmingham	581
West Yorkshire	580
Wigan and Bolton	579
Tees	560
Southern Derbyshire	552
Gloucestershire	549
Bedfordshire	543
Portsmouth and South-east Hampshire	538
Sheffield	530
East Riding	529
East Lancashire	506
Warwickshire	496
East and North Hertfordshire	488
Bradford	482
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	479
Newcastle and North Tyneside	477
Liverpool	474
West Pennine	473
New River	473
North Staffordshire	472
Southampton and South–west Hampshire	467
North-west Lancashire	465
Exeter and North Devon	465
Brent and Harrow	460
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	455
Salford and Trafford	445
Manchester	435
Bexley and Greenwich	434
South Birmingham	428
Somerset	423
Shropshire	416
Eastern Surrey	411
North-west Anglia	408
Bury and Rochdale	396
North Nottinghamshire	396
Barking and Havering	377
North Derbyshire	371
Grimsby and Scunthorpe	361
South Tyne	359
Camden and Islington	358
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	341
St Helens and Knowsley	335
Wirral	333
North Durham	329
Croydon	327
North Cumbria	318
Wakefield	317
Dudley	312
South Lancashire	311
North Cheshire	310
Barnet	308
Northumberland	308
Kingston and Richmond	307
Morecambe Bay	307
Coventry	303
Cambridge	299
Sunderland	296
Sandwell	294
Sefton	293
Doncaster	293
Bromley	292
Stockport	289
South Durham	280
North Worcestershire	278
Walsall	264

District Health Authorities in England ranked in order of population

District Health Authority	*Estimated resident population mid-1994 (thousands)*
North-west Hertfordshire	263
Worcester and District	257
Rotherham	256
South-west Hertfordshire	250
Wolverhampton	244
Hillingdon	243
Barnsley	226
Solihull	202
Herefordshire	165
Huntingdon	139
Isle of Wight	125
England	48,707

Source: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

NHS Trusts (Borrowing)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which trusts have been given permission by the Secretary of State to borrow in currencies other than sterling, indicating the amount and the currency concerned. [8712]

Mr. Horam: No trust has been given permission by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to borrow in currencies other than sterling.

Discharged Mental Health Patients

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department maintains on *(a)* suicides and *(b)* homicides committed by (i) current and (ii) discharged mental health patients. [9101]

Mr. Bowis: Information on homicides and suicides by current and recently discharged mental health patients is collected by the confidential inquiry into homicides and suicides by mentally ill people. The inquiry is funded by, but independent of, the Department of Health.

Carers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what current instructions he has issued to local authorities on the effects of means testing of those patients in need of long-term care on caring spouses and family; and if he will make a statement. [9118]

Mr. Bowis: The most recent guidance to local authorities was issued in December in circular LAC(95)21, and an amendment to the charging for residential accommodation guide was issued at the same time, advising local authorities that they should consider use of their discretion where a married resident in residential accommodation is the main recipient of a couple's income at the point when a financial assessment is made, and also advises what factors and circumstances should be taken into account. Copies of the circular and the charging for residential accommodation guide are available in the Library. The Government intend to change the regulations with effect from April 1996 so that local authorities will be required to disregard half of the occupational pension of a resident whose spouse remains at home.

Residential and Nursing Homes

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department will conduct a survey for publication of the practice of all local authorities to establish whether they are exercising the discretion to disregard spouses of which they were reminded in his Department's circular LAC(94)1 in January 1994, paragraph 2.2 regarding charges for residential or nursing home accommodation; if he will require an authority failing to exercise this discretion in favour of spouses to provide an explanation; and if he will make a statement. [9121]

Mr. Bowis: We have no plans to do so. It is for local authorities to decide how and to what extent they exercise their discretion. Regulations will however, shortly be laid before Parliament to require local authorities to disregard from the means test half of the occupational pension of a resident whose spouse remains at home.

Single-sex Wards

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has to improve the provision of single-sex accommodation by NHS trusts. [7531]

Mr. Horam: It is for health authorities and trusts to decide how best to use the accommodation available to them.

Female NHS Managers

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what percentage of non-clinical managers in the NHS earning over £30,000 per year were women for each year since 1991; [7532]

(2) how many chief executives of hospital trusts were women in each year since 1991. [7534]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally.

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department is taking to improve the representation of women in the higher levels of management in the NHS. [7533]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health, on behalf of the national health service, is a founder member of opportunity 2000—the business-led campaign to improve the representation of women at the top of organisations.

The NHS women's unit was established in October 1991 to take forward work on implementing Opportunity 2000 and eight goals were issued to the service for achievement by 31 December 1994, including a goal to increase the proportion of women in general management posts from 18 per cent. in 1991 to 30 per cent. in 1994.

As part of the policy review in March 1995, a special survey was undertaken which showed that women had been appointed to 38 per cent.—83 out of 214—of vacant chief executive general manager posts filled in the three years to 31 December 1994, with women now occupying 28 per cent. of posts at this level.

The NHS executive was commended on its outstanding achievement at the first Opportunity 2000 awards ceremony held in October 1995. Building on this success, a new set of goals was issued to the service for

achievement by 30 September 1998 including a goal to increase the percentage of women in top management posts to 35 per cent.

Cervical Cytology

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of GP practices met higher rate targets for cervical cytology services by family health services authority for each year since 1990. [7535]

Mr. Malone: Target information is collected at general practitioner, not practice, level. The percentage of unrestricted principles meeting both the lower and the higher targets for April 1990 to April 1994 will be placed in the Library.

Abortion

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the district health authorities not currently purchasing abortion services; and if he will make a statement. [7536]

Mr. Horam: Health authorities are responsible for securing services to meet the health needs of their population. Information about individual health authority plans is not available centrally.

Mixed-sex Wards

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how his Department is monitoring the performance of NHS trusts on meeting the patients charter standards on mixed-sex wards; [7537]

(2) how many NHS trusts are currently meeting the patients charter standard on mixed-sex wards. [7538]

Mr. Horam: It is for health authorities to monitor the performance of those hospitals with which they place contracts. Their annual patients charter reports should include information on hospitals' performance against the standards. In addition, the national health service executive has commissioned a survey in two regions on policies relating to mixed-sex wards and the suitability of wards for mixed-sex use. The results of that survey will be available shortly.

Derriford Hospital (Correspondence)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter dated 21 August from the consultant in pain management at Derriford hospital, Plymouth; and what factors have prevented him from replying hitherto. [8186]

Mr. Horam: Officials have now replied to the inquiry. I regret the delay which occurred; this was due to an oversight.

Care Programme Approach

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 18 December, *Official Report*, column *945*, which *(a)* health authorities and *(b)* trusts have (i) implemented and (ii) not implemented the care programme approach. [9185]

Mr. Bowis: The national health service executive has requested reports on the progress made towards fully implementing the care programme approach.

NHS (Unnecessary Treatments)

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent reports he has received alleging *(a)* unnecessary and *(b)* ineffective treatments provided by the national health service; what proposals he has to remedy such defects; and if he will make a statement. [8562]

Mr. Horam: A great deal of scientific evidence now exists about the effectiveness of health services. Improving the effectiveness of services is a priority for the national health service.

On 10 January, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced the publication of "Promoting Clinical Effectiveness". The booklet has been developed to support the work of all those involved in identifying and reviewing the effectiveness of clinical services. It explains where to get information on effectiveness, how this information can be used to improve services locally and how the results of change can be monitored. The NHS executive will hold health authorities to account for increasing their investment in healthcare which is now known to be more effective. Copies of the publication are available in the Library.

Blood Supplies

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he has received on the levels of blood held at the blood transfusion centres; and what changes have taken place during the last six months of 1995 at each of these centres. [8563]

Mr. Horam: Blood stocks at blood centres are quite low at present, but this is often the case at this time of year because of seasonal and other fluctuations in supply and demand. Stocks at blood centres are not the whole picture. Hospitals also have their own blood banks, drawing supplies from the national blood service blood banks.

The figures over the last six months for individual centres are:

	12 July	*16 September*	*13 September*	*11 October*	*15 November*	*13 December*
Brentwood	752	1,796	1,296	1,079	1,108	1,077
Cambridge	658	2,169	1,052	591	620	527
Colindale	1,390	1,620	1,399	1,216	1,024	952
Tooting	1,411	1,885	2,091	1,536	1,786	1,497
Birmingham	1,622	3,275	3,467	2,139	2,729	[illegible]
Bristol	1,343	2,033	1,695	1,295	1,565	[illegible]
Oxford	748	1,973	1,562	1,307	1,175	727

	12 July	16 September	13 September	11 October	15 November	13 December
Wessex	804	1,966	1,923	1,761	1,849	1,061
Lancaster	421	624	646	568	329	358
Leeds	1,866	2,596	2,281	2,408	1,168	920
Liverpool	1,604	2,516	2,139	2,372	1,341	954
Manchester	751	1,412	601	742	825	527
Newcastle	965	1,920	1,667	1,456	1,045	1,044
Trent	950	2,165	1,535	1,318	1,213	1,147
Totals	15,485	27,950	23,354	19,788	17,777	12,934

These figures are based on the position on the middle Wednesday of each month. There have been no organisational changes at any of the blood centres during this period. The National Blood Authority arranges for supplies to be moved between centres as necessary, so assistance can be given if there are particular problems in any area.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* guidelines and *(b)* other advice has been issued to (i) NHS bodies and (ii) other organisations regarding the use of the private finance initiative. [9082]

Mr. Horam: Current guidelines and advice on the private finance initiative issued by the national health service executive are as follows:

"The Capital Investment Manual" (HMSO 1994),

"Private Finance and Capital Investment Projects", (HSG(95)15),

"Information Management and Technology (IM&T) Procurement and Private Finance" (HSG(95)48).

Copies of these publications are available in the Library.

It is not part of our responsibility to issue guidelines or advice on private finance to other organisations. Guidelines issued by the Treasury on private finance matters across the public service, including the NHS, is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which capital projects are currently being considered under the private finance initiative; and what is the cost of each project. [9055]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville) gave him on 28 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *608*.

Since that reply, two further schemes with a capital value more than £1 million have been approved by the national health service executive under the private finance initiative, as follows:

South Buckinghamshire NHS trust; new hospital developments at High Wycombe and Amersham at a capital value of £35 million

Havering Hospitals NHS trust; renewal and maintenance of engineering plant and equipment through a technical service programme. Capital value £2.1 million.

Elective Surgery

Mr. Austin Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the number of cancellations of elective surgical admissions by NHS trusts in Greater London in *(a)* October, *(b)* November and *(c)* December; and if he will make a statement; [9163]

(2) how many cancellations of elective non-urgent surgical admissions were made by the Greenwich Healthcare NHS trusts *(a)* over the weekend of 5 January and *(b)* on 8 January; and if he will make a statement. [9162]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally.

In Vitro Fertilisation

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list those health commissions which have decided that in vitro fertilisation services will *(a)* be routinely purchased and *(b)* not be purchased; and if he will make a statement; [8580]

(2) if he will make it his policy to ensure that in vitro fertilisation services are available from every health commission; and if he will make a statement. [8581]

Mr. Horam: Information about individual health authority plans is not held centrally.

Decisions about provision, priority and resources for infertility services, including in vitro fertilisation treatment are made by individual health authorities, who are in the best position to determine priorities in the light of local needs and circumstances. Decisions must be made on the basis of sound evidence.

Medical Locums

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 28 November 1995 on national health service staff, *Official Report*, column *614*, if he will provide details of medical locums by specialty. [8652]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 9 January *Official Report*, column *74*.

"NHS Magazine"

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the cost so far of producing and distributing "NHS Magazine"; how much has been raised from advertising; and if he will make a statement. [8921]

Mr. Horam: The national health service executive is reducing the volume of publications issued and targeting printed communications more precisely to ensure

resources are used to best effect. As a result of a review of publications, the executive ceased production of six NHS newsletters, making an estimated annual saving of £227,000. The executive is also seeking a more cost-effective approach, supporting the costs of the "NHS Magazine" with advertising.

"NHS Magazine" acts as a vehicle for sharing best practice within the NHS. It also carries the most up to date quarterly data about NHS performance, helping to ensure that the service remains properly accountable to those it serves.

Production costs/gross revenues broken down by issue are:

	Issue 1 £	*Issue 2* £	*Issue 3* £
Production (Editorial/photography/ design/reproduction, print)	41,886	43,914	50,486
Advertising revenue	10,900	16,850	30,500

Distribution costs for the first three issues were £17,664.

Emergency Admissions (London)

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made on the impact of other hospital care of the number of emergency medical admissions to London hospitals during the current winter; and if he will make a statement. [9165]

Mr. Horam: Health authorities and national health service trusts are responsible for ensuring that local healthcare needs are met.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many emergency medical admissions were made by each London NHS trust in each month during the period October 1994 to January 1996. [9200]

Mr. Horam: Information on method of admission by region of treatment is published in "Hospital Episode Statistics—Volume 1", copies of which are available in the Library. The latest year for which information is available is 1993–94.

Edgware General Hospital

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is his policy that no changes will be made in relation to the closure of the accident and emergency department of Edgware general hospital until the assurances given by his predecessor in the debate on 10 May 1995, *Official Report*, columns *784–85*, have been fully implemented. [8585]

Mr. Malone: Yes.

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make an official visit to Edgware general hospital. [8578]

Mr. Malone: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so.

Acute Bed Closures (London)

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many acute beds closed in each London NHS trust during the period 1993 to 1995; and if he will make a statement. [9164]

Mr. Horam: The information available centrally provides details of the average daily number of available beds in each national health service trust for 1993–94 and 1994–95. This information is published annually in *Bed availability for England*, copies of which are available in the Library. Organisational changes mean that the data for each trust may not be strictly comparable over time.

Working Lunches

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent in his Department and its associated agencies on working lunches in the year 1995–96 to date; and what is the projected amount for the full year. [9170]

Mr. Horam: The amount of expenditure on working lunches to the end of December this financial year is:

	£
Department	182,889
Agencies	333
Total	183,222

It is expected that hospitality expenditure for the Department will continue at the current rate for the remainder of the year. The agencies are projecting total expenditure for the year of the order of £380.

Income Support

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library a copy of the guidelines for hospitals for reimbursement of travel costs for those in receipt of income support; if the guidelines recognise the UB40 as a proof of receipt of income support; what proof of being in receipt of income support is required for those not paid by an order book; and what was the last occasion on which the guidelines were amended. [9530]

Mr. Horam: The guidelines for reimbursement of the cost of travel to hospital do not recognise form UB40 as proof of receipt of income support because not everybody who is issued with that form is in receipt of that benefit For those who are not paid income support by an order book, one of forms B3, C3, FF260 or FF260A covering the day they attend the hospital, can be presented as proof of eligibility.

The guidelines were last amended in October 1994 with a reminder being sent out in May 1995. The list of documents which can be produced as proof of eligibility was reviewed in 1995 and set out in leaflet H11 which was effective from April 1995.

Copies of the guidelines and of leaflet H11 have been placed in the Library.

Waiting List Initiative

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the level of waiting list initiative funding and how many patients have been treated *(a)* by region and *(b)* by district and in each year since its inception. [9513]

Mr. Horam: A national waiting time fund existed from 1987–88 to 1993–94. Distribution was to regional health authorities and details of the allocations made are shown in the table. Information on allocations to districts is not available centrally.

The numbers of patients treated under waiting list initiatives are not separately identified. From September 1987 to September 1995 the number of patients waiting more than 12 months has reduced from 209,440 to 27,900 and the number waiting more that two years has fallen from 90,470 to nil.

Distribution of central waiting times fund 1987–1994

	Allocations (£000s)							
	1987–88	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*Total*
Northern	1,700	1,925	1,737	1,798	1,665	2,216	3,002	14,043
Yorkshire	1,757	2,097	2,538	2,017	2,178	2,659	3,562	16,808
Trent	2,650	2,895	2,489	2,923	2,779	3,307	3,988	21,031
East Anglia	1,018	1,046	1,327	1,135	2,099	1,846	1,939	10,410
North-west Thames	1,590	2,316	2,428	1,690	2,768	3,549	5,230	19,571
North-east Thames	2,070	2,767	3,400	3,808	4,769	3,169	4,083	24,066
South-east Thames	2,040	2,350	2,653	2,738	3,909	3,562	5,220	22,472
South-west Thames	1,330	2,013	1,674	2,138	2,938	2,332	3,172	15,597
Wessex	1,400	1,609	1,518	2,024	2,217	2,317	2,875	13,960
Oxford	1,010	1,163	992	1,638	1,733	2,056	2,604	11,196
South Western	1,650	1,915	1,665	1,546	2,137	2,773	3,537	15,223
West Midlands	3,120	3,354	3,250	4,472	4,440	3,424	4,780	26,840
Mersey	1,350	1,693	1,925	1,515	2,300	2,272	2,579	13,634
North Western	2,295	256	2,407	2,860	2,735	3,344	4,311	18,208
Special Health Authorities	—	140	301	200	420	530	662	2,253
Miscellaneous	—	—	266	498	518	249	147	1,678
Total	24,980	27,539	30,570	33,000	39,605	39,605	51,691	246,990

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what information his Department holds on the proportion of waiting list initiative funding that has been spent in the private sector; [9538]

(2) what monitoring is undertaken of clinical standards for the private sector in respect of patients being treated under the waiting list initiative. [9517]

Mr. Horam: Information on the proportion of waiting list initiative funding spent in the private sector is not available centrally. Monitoring of the standard of care, wherever it is provided, is a matter for the relevant purchaser.

Environmental Pollution Report

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what dates and on what matters, in connection with the 18th report of the Royal Commission on environmental pollution, "Transport and the Environment", he has made representations to the Secretary of State for Transport. [9095]

Mr. Horam: There have been many contacts between my Department and the Department of Transport concerning the Royal Commission report since its publication in October 1994, including several discussions at both official and ministerial level.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

New Facilities

32. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, what new facilities are planned to be available after the next general election. [7473]

Mr. Beith: The major new facilities planned are the phase II new parliamentary building, which is due to open in 1999, and a visitors' centre in Westminster hall. In addition major improvements to existing facilities are planned including the improvement of access by disabled people, the refurbishment of the Refreshment Department and the installation of the parliamentary data and video network.

HMSO Privatisation

38. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, what assessment the Commission has made of the effect of services to hon. and right hon. Members of the proposed privatisation of HMSO; and if he will make a statement. [7480]

Mr. Beith: The Commission's views are set out in the letter from the Speaker to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster which was published in *Hansard* on 11 December, columns *455–57*. That letter laid down a number of safeguards which the Commission consider necessary to protect the interests of the House in the event of HMSO being privatised. The Commission will continue to take a close interest in the progress of preparatory work for privatisation. In particular we will want to be satisfied that the safeguards are adequately secured by the contract to be drawn up between the House and a privatised Stationery Office.

Legionnaire's Disease

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee if he will make a statement on the risk of legionnaire's disease in the parliamentary estate. [7485]

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I have been asked to reply.

The water systems throughout the parliamentary estate are regularly tested for the legionnella bacterium as part of routine maintenance work. This work also includes sterilisation of cooling towers and shower heads, and keeping the domestic hot water temperatures above the tolerance of the bacterium. The results of recent routine tests showed slightly raised levels which have been dealt with by pasteurisation and chemical sterilisation. It is also proposed to make minor changes to plumbing in remote areas to help maintain safe water temperatures.

Refreshment Facilities

Mr. Hain: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee what plans he has to upgrade refreshment facilities for large groups of visitors to the House. [7475]

Sir Colin Shepherd: On 12 July 1994, the House approved the first report of Session 1992–93 from the Catering Committee, "Refreshment provision for line of route visitors". One recommendation was that the area currently occupied by the Westminster hall cafeteria should be converted to a visitor centre, which would provide light refreshments for the public, but that this should only take place once a suitable alternative has been found for the present lunchtime users.

Although initial discussions between officials have been held regarding the proposed nature of a visitor centre, I do have to advise the hon. Member that some 500 people, mainly staff, have lunch daily in the Westminster hall cafeteria; the other outlets currently available to staff would not be able to accommodate the extra customers if the Westminster hall cafeteria was closed before the opening of the new cafeteria in the phase II parliamentary building, which I understand, will not be until 1999. It is therefore highly unlikely that a visitor centre could be open before then.

Privileges Committee

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Lord President of the Council what contact, direct or indirect, he has had with the chairman of the Press Complaints Commission in regard to the findings of the Privileges Committee in its first report for the session 1994–95 as they affect the *Sunday Times* and the Committee's call for further examination by the commission of the complaint made against that newspaper; what developments there have been since the Privileges Committee's findings were published; and if he will make a statement. [8593]

Mr. Newton: At his request, I met my right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Wakeham, chairman of the Press Complaints Commission, on Monday 20 November 1995 to discuss progress on this matter. Lord Wakeham has recently written to me, as Chairman of the Committee of Privileges, reporting on the position. I have arranged for copies of his letter to be placed in the Library of the House of Commons.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Playing Fields

Mr. Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she will be in a position to consult on the proposal contained in the Government's policy statement "Sport: Raising the Game" that the Sports Council should be given the status of a statutory consultee on planning proposals affecting playing fields. [9684]

Mr. Sproat: The Government are seriously concerned at the loss of playing fields. We attach high priority to ensuring that people have access to a range of high quality sports facilities. There is a clear need to improve consultation between the Sports Council and local planning authorities whenever proposals for the development of playing fields arise. We are, therefore, issuing today, jointly with the Department of the Environment, a consultation paper on the proposal that the Sports Council should become a statutory consultee on planning proposals affecting all playing fields, not only those used by schools.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

EU Energy Council

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Energy Council meeting on 20 December 1995. [8692]

Mr. Eggar: The Council considered several issues and received reports on matters of interest. I represented the United Kingdom. Progress was made in a number of areas. In particular, political agreement was reached on a proposed directive on energy efficiency standards for fridges and freezers, the aim of which is to establish minimum standards and thus help to limited CO^2 emissions. The directive provides for a 15 per cent. reduction in electricity consumption for all new models over three years.

The Council also adopted a common position on the Commission's proposed regulation on the registration of crude oil imports.

It was not possible to reach a common position on the electricity liberalisation proposal. Ministers agreed however that there had been a convergence of positions during the Spanish presidency and that work should be continued during the Italian presidency with a view to possible agreement early in 1996.

The Council considered a Commission proposal for the repeal and/or simplification of several EU legislative measures in the energy efficiency, oil and gas sub-sectors. In particular, political agreement was reached on a Commission proposal to simplify regulation 1056/72 on the notification of investments.

Also, the Council received presentations/reports from the Commission on a number of items. These included a presentation of its energy policy White Paper; a report on gas supply and prospects to 2020; and its proposal for a second SAVE programme, aimed at encouraging best use of energy efficiency technology.

The presidency gave a progress report on informal contacts with the European Parliament on Energy TENs prior to the convening of the conciliation committee. Progress reports were also given on the energy charter treaty, SYNERGY and on the energy aspects of the Barcelona Euro-Med conference.

EU Industry Council

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Industry Council held on 20 December 1995. [8691]

Mr. Eggar: The meeting examined further a Commission proposal to authorise the payment of exceptional state aid for Irish Steel under article 95 of the ECSC treaty. This matter was previously discussed by the Council on 7 November 1995, when the Government declined to agree the proposal in view of concerns about possible adverse effects on the United Kingdom steel industry.

Bilateral discussions between the UK and Ireland immediately prior to the 20 December Council resulted in agreement on a revised aid package subject, at the insistence of the UK, to a number of strict conditions. These include, over five years, caps on Irish Steel's overall production, limits on sale of hot rolled products into the EU—under 300kt in the first year—and an undertaking that the company will not, over the same period, extend its current range of finished products. Overall the conditions are stricter than those attached to the previous article 95 decisions of December 1993. The Government believe that these improvements over the original Commission proposal meet the objective of ensuring that jobs in Ireland are not preserved at the expense of jobs in the UK.

The amended proposals was accepted unanimously by member states. Formal approval will take place at a future Council.

Ice Cream

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether he has received a report from the Director General of Fair Trading in relation to the provision of evidence by Bird's Eye Wall's to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission investigation into the supply of ice cream; what advice the director general of Fair Trading has given him in respect of such evidence; when he expects to take further action; and what action he proposes to take to ensure that accurate information is available to the director general. [9053]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have received a confidential report from the Director General of Fair Trading on this matter. It is not the practice of the Department to comment publicly on such reports. Any decisions which need to be taken will be announced in due course.

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the total number of industrial tribunals held in each of the last five years in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland and *(b)* the Glasgow area; and in what percentage of cases the appellant was successful. [9036]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information requested is as follows:

	Total number of cases determined at hearing	*Percentage of successful cases*
1990–91		
England	9,118	50
Wales[1]	630	44
Scotland	1,682	42
Glasgow	982	41
1991–92		
England	11,592	52
Wales[1]	880	53
Scotland	1,382	41
Glasgow	817	40
1992–93		
England	14,827	53
Wales[1]	1,091	54
Scotland	1,760	48
Glasgow	985	47

	Total number of cases determined at hearing	Percentage of successful cases
1993–94		
England	19,966	52
Wales[1]	1,442	49
Scotland	1,888	47
Glasgow	1,082	45
1994–95[2]		
England	18,003	49
Wales[1]	1,346	48
Scotland	2,400	41
Glasgow	1,277	43

[1] Includes cases determined at hearings in Shrewsbury, some which may have originated in England.
[2] Figures are provisional.

Iraq (Military Equipment)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what inquiries he has made into the issue by the Export Credits Guarantee Department of financial guarantees to United Kingdom financial institutions in relation to trade with Iraq which may have breached the Government's guidelines on the export of military and related equipment; and what action, if any, has been taken as a result; [7801]

(2) if he will estimate the amount paid by the Export Credits Guarantee Department to the Midland bank since 1980 in respect of trade with Iraq by *(a)* Astra Holdings, *(b)* British Aerospace, *(c)* Royal Ordnance, *(d)* Vickers, *(e)* Racal *(f)* Plessey and *(g)* Thorn EMI; what assessment he has made of whether the relevant guarantees related to trade in breach of the Government's guidelines on the export to Iraq of military and related equipment; what action he has taken; and if he will make a statement; [7803]

(3) if he will estimate the amount claimed by United Kingdom clearing banks since 1980 in respect of Export Credits Guarantee Department guarantees given in relation to trade with Iraq; what proportion of this sum he estimates was claimed in relation to trade in breach of the Government's guidelines on the export to Iraq of military and related equipment; and if he will make a statement. [7804]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 11 January 1996]:* The consistency of ECGD support for certain export contracts with Government guidelines on trade for Iraq at the times is a matter which Sir Richard Scott may cover in his forthcoming report, on which I cannot comment at this stage. However, it has always been a condition of ECGD support that exporters obtain the requisite export licences.

Amounts paid by ECGD to Midland bank since 1980 under guaranteed lines of credits extended to Iraq included sums relating to contracts undertaken by Racal and by Thorn EMI, but not in relation to any of the other companies named. The total principal value of claims paid by ECGD in respect of these contracts was approximately £22 million.

It has been the practice of successive Governments not to disclose the details of individual contracts without the agreement of the parties concerned.

The total of claims paid under ECGD guarantees in relation to trade with Iraq was £683 million as at 31 December 1995. Of this, £578 million was paid to banks under buyer credit and line of credit facilities; the balance having been paid to banks under buyer credit and line of credit facilities; the balance having been paid directly to exporters under short-term or supplier credit facilities. As against the figure of £578 million, recoveries of £72 million have been made, bringing the total outstanding unrecovered claims for buyer credit facilities to £506 million. A breakdown of the amounts claimed as between United Kingdom clearing banks and other banks, or of the amounts held by individual banks for their own account where loans have been syndicated, is not readily available.

Huw Evans

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his letter to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West of 29 December, if he will give his current estimate of the length of time to be taken by the Employment Agency's standards office in Birmingham for its investigation into Allied Medicare Services and the employment of Huw Evans as a temporary auxiliary nurse in south Wales hospitals. [9183]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The investigation is under way, but it is too early to say when it will be completed. I shall write to the hon. Member by the end of the month to let him know progress.

Electromagnetic Compatibility Directive

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received in respect of the simplification of United Kingdom regulations to enforce the EC electromagnetic compatibility directive, particularly regarding the impact of the regulations on smaller firms; and if he will make a statement. [9461]

Mr. Page: The electromagnetic compatibility directive 89/336/EEC was implemented by the Electromagnetic Compatibility Regulations, SI 1992 No. 2372, which came fully into force on 1 January 1996. Under the regulations all apparatus marketed in the United Kingdom, including imports, must satisfy the requirements of the directive and carry CE marking. The main requirements are that apparatus should not cause excessive electromagnetic interference or be unduly affected by it.

There are three ways of demonstrating compliance: self-certification to the relevant European standard; preparation of a technical file assessed by a competent body; and type examination. Testing is not mandatory except for apparatus designed for the transmission of radiocommunications.

No representations have been received concerning simplification of the regulations but the Department continues to receive requests for advice on how to comply. The Government have provided extensive advice in the period up to January 1996 and have established regional EMC clubs. Technical telephone helplines, funded by DTI, are also currently available.

Clothing (Labelling)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to ensure that clothes retailed in the United Kingdom which carry "Made in the UK" labels are manufactured in the United Kingdom. [9108]

Mr. John M. Taylor: It is an offence under the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 to supply or offer for sale any goods, including clothing, with a false or misleading indication of their origin.

Departmental Buildings

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the cost of the buildings constructed for his Department in each year since 1979. [7547]

Mr. Lang: The cost of buildings constructed for the DTI are set out in the table. Similar information is not readily available for the functions transferred to the Department under the Machinery of Government changes earlier this financial year.

Financial Year	*£ million*
1979–80 to 1983–84	nil
1984–85	9
1985–86	9
1986–87	12.3
1987–88	9
1988–89	9
1989–90	9.1
1990–91	12.3
1991–92	9.1
1992–93 to date	nil

Mobile Phones

Mr. William Ross: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many mobile telephones have been supplied to his Department in each of the last eight years; and in each of those years how many different suppliers were involved. [9131]

Mr. Lang: Central records are not kept of procurements of mobile telephones which are now procured locally. However it is estimated that, excluding next steps agencies, there are currently in the region of 800 mobile telephones in use in my Department which have come from a variety of suppliers.

Environmental Pollution Report

Ms Ruddock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on what dates and on what matters in connection with the 18th report of the Royal Commission on environmental pollution, "Transport and the Environment", he has made representations to the Secretary of State for Transport. [9100]

Mr. Page: There have been many contacts between my Department and the Department of Transport concerning the royal commission report since its publication in October 1994, including several discussions at both official and ministerial level.

Executive Agencies

Dr. Wright: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if answers sent to hon. Members in reply to parliamentary questions by the head of executive agencies in his Department are *(a)* seen, *(b)* approved and *(c)* amended by him before they are sent; and if he will identify any such letters to which amendments by him have been made in 1994–95. [7826]

Mr. Lang: Parliamentary questions are passed to the head of an executive agency for reply when the matter is one delegated to him under the agency framework document. The relevant Minister may see a copy of the reply before it is sent, but would not normally intervene in operational matters. I am not aware of any recent replies that have been amended.

Business Start-up Scheme

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many grants representing what total sums and with what average value were awarded under the business start-up scheme in each region of Britain in each year of the scheme's existence. [7583]

Mr. Paice: I have been asked to reply.

The precise information requested is not available. Starts by region are available for 1994–95 and are given in table 1. Total expenditure and number of starts in England for each year of the programme are given in table 2. In 1994–95 the scheme was absorbed with the single regeneration budget.

Table 1: Business Start-up Scheme: Starts by English Region 1994–95

Region	*Starts*
South East	2,393
London	3,081
Eastern	1,925
South West	2,801
West Midlands	1,576
East Midlands	3,042
Yorkshire and Humberside	3,402
Merseyside	1,356
North West	3,058
North East	1,602

Table 2: Business Start-up Scheme: Starts and Expenditure in England

Year	*Starts*	*Expenditure (£ million)*
1992–93	33,600	62.0
1993–94	34,700	82.0
1994–95	24,236	63.8

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Aid-for-trade Provision

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the 10 companies which have been leading indirect beneficiaries of aid-for-trade provision spending since the scheme's inception; and what percentage of total aid-for-trade provision spending each has attracted. [8236]

Mr. Hanley: The 10 companies which have won the most ATP supported business as prime contractors since the scheme's inception in 1978 are:

Company	*ATP allocation (£ million)*	*Percentage of ATP total*
Trafalgar House (including Davy and John Brown Engineering)	164.27	11.91
GEC	154.00	11.17
Balfour Beatty	105.85	7.68
Rolls Royce (including NEI)	68.82	4.99
Biwater	61.59	4.47
AMEC	58.70	4.25
Foster Wheeler	53.85	3.90
Snamprogetti UK	47.18	3.42
Siemens Plessey	43.04	3.12
Philips UK	34.11	2.47
Total	791.41	57.38
ATP total allocated[1]	1,379.21	—

[1] Due to rounding the totals may not balance. (The Balfour Beatty figure includes £24.37 million spend in respect of the Pergau hydro electric project before 1994–95. This project is no longer being financed by the aid and trade provision.

It is not possible to provide figures for the amount of business retained by the prime contractor as opposed to the amount handled by subcontractors. It should however be noted that the extent of subcontracting is normally considerable.

General Electric Company

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total value of contracts awarded to GEC by the Overseas Development Administration in each year since 1990. [8237]

Mr. Hanley: The only relevant contracts awarded since 1990 are two contracts, one to the value of £450,000 awarded in 1991, and a second worth £494,974 in 1992 to separate companies owned jointly by GEC and Alcatel Alsthom of France.

The ODA has financed several contracts between GEC or its subsidiary companies and overseas clients. Since 1990, we have supported a number of such contracts, including in 1993 and 1994 grants to finance two power projects in India totalling £81.8 million and in 1995 a grant of £15.516 million for a power project in Indonesia.

Non-governmental Organisations

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list *(a)* the amount of grants to NGOs from the ODA and *(b)* the amount of UK aid money disbursed through NGOs in the last year for which figures are available. [8946]

Mr. Hanley: All expenditure from the ODA to non-governmental organisations, NGOs, is provided on a grant basis. The sum of all grants for 1994–95 made by the Overseas Development Administration to United Kingdom NGOs for work in developing countries was £173,124,136, as detailed in the table. The comparable figure in 1992–93 was £141,791,127, in 1993–94 it was £148,610,155.

In addition, we made grants to United Kingdom NGOs for work in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union—in 1994–95 amounting to £11,989,655. The comparable figure in 1992–93 was £5,634,899; in 1993–94 it was £9,839,600.

United Kingdom NGOs also draw substantially on European Community aid programmes to which we contribute.

The table provides details of all ODA grants in 1994–95.

1994–95 Direct grants to United Kingdom Non-governmental Organisations [1](excluding Eastern Europe)

Voluntary Organisation	*Amount of direct grant awarded in financial year [2]1994–95*
ACORD	2,282,748
Action Disability and Development	137,290
Action Health 2000	51,382
Action Aid	2,945,706
Afghan Aid	1,150,000
Africa Now	147,691
Africa Resource Trust	100,000
Africa Soc Int and Com Law	23,750
Aro-Asian Jour of Nematology	180
Aga Khan Foundation	978,577
AHRTAG	414,697
AMAR Appeal	85,000
AMREF	398,535
APTT Trust UK	7,836
Association for Better Land Husbandry	167,684
Association of Pioneer Rescue Officers	114,000
Associated Country Women World	13,891
Association of Commonwealth University	2,490,462
Bernt Carlsson Trust	116,000
Birdlife International	189,273
Britain Afghanistan Trust	54,000
Britain Nepal Medical Trust	90,414
British Direct Aid (UK)	228,577
British Executive Service Overseas	754,699
British Red Cross Society	17,690,732
British Refugee Council	10,000
British Society Pop Studies	3,145
Business in the Community	5,000
Busoga Trust	98,715
CAFOD	7,803,959
Calcutta Rescue Fund	1,737
Calcutta Tercentenary Trust	10,849
Cambodia Trust	79,134
Canon Collins Education Trust SA	17,037
Canterbury Christ Church IPO	87,039
CARE	10,988,910
Care for the Wild	50,000
Catholic Inst International Relations	1,952,813
Charities Aid Foundation	18,366
Charities Evaluation Services	19,396
Childhope	112,331
Christian Aid	7,542,606
Christian Children's Fund (GB)	125,754
Christian Engineers in Development	24,690
Christian Outreach	294,168
Christians Abroad	180,747
Church Missionary Society	20,902
Co-op For Development	176,115

1994–95 Direct grants to United Kingdom Non-governmental Organisations [1](excluding Eastern Europe)

Voluntary Organisation	*Amount of direct grant awarded in financial year [2]1994–95*
CODA International Training	178,960
Commonwealth Human Ecology	58,762
Commonwealth TUC	113,492
Concern Universal	60,777
Concern Worldwide	3,319,941
Conservation Foundation	9,189
Cranfield Institute of Technology	44,055
Cusichaca Project Trust	23,668
Durham-Lesotho Link	20,913
Earthwatch Europe	3,091
Education for Development	1,180
Education Partners Overseas	58,753
FARM	516,572
Feed the Children	341,145
Feed the Minds	23,686
Find Your Feet	9,100
Food for Hungry International	449,152
Friends of Urambo and Mwanhala	8,626
Friends of ASSEFA	38,197
Friends of Conservation	27,468
GOAL	1,291,949
Gordon Barclay Vietnam Fund	7,663
Gurkha Welfare Trust	296,233
HALO Trust	1,912,561
Harvest Help	30,439
Health Aid Moyo	55,999
Health Aid-UK	66,840
Health Projects Abroad	49,724
Health Unlimited	703,958
Hedley Roberts Trust	2,804
Help International	98,105
HelpAge International	298,148
Help The Aged	286,906
Holy Trinity Church Middlesex	13,000
Ideas Aid International UK	20,000
Impact Foundation	25,355
India Development Group	85,750
Institute of Development Studies	3,171,052
Institute of Data Processing Management	471
Institute for Animal Health	93,396
International Year of Shelter	192,948
Intermediate Technology Development	3,809,370
International Bee Research Association	22,652
International Cent Agroforestry	100,000
International Childcare Trust	59,978
International Children's Trust	11,619
International Christian Relief	54,166
International Family Health	42,074
International Health Exchange	31,798
International Refugee Trust	34,750
International Rescue Corps	3,672
International Extension College	151,372
International HIV/AIDS Alliance	216,400
INTRAC	60,429
IPPF	9,135,018
Islamic Relief	59,946
Joint Mission Hospital Equipment Board	471,563
John Innes Institute	27,075
Kerala Federation for the Blind	6,072
King Mehendra Trust	78,368
Kurdish Cultural Society	10,040
Lasallian Projects	7,504
Legal Assistance Trust	60,000
Leonard Cheshire Foundation	55,012

1994–95 Direct grants to United Kingdom Non-governmental Organisations [1](excluding Eastern Europe)

Voluntary Organisation	*Amount of direct grant awarded in financial year [2]1994–95*
Leprosy Mission	9,988
Leprosy Mission (Scotland)	23,760
Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine	1,794,324
Living Earth	169,595
Marie Stopes International	2,018,930
Marlborough Brandt Group	72
Medecins Sans Frontieres	1,382,823
Medical Aid for Iraq	280,000
Medical Aid for Palestinians	340,908
Medical Emergency Relief International	1,253,902
Medical Research Council	1,812,906
Methodist Church Overseas	2,264
Mines Advisory Group	1,038,944
Money for Madagascar	10,625
Nairobi Hospice Charitable Trust	35,821
National Children's Homes	9,400
New Economics Foundation	15,685
New Hope Rural Community Trust	2,956
Ockenden Venture	150,341
One World Action	80,225
One World Broadcasting Trust	44,000
Opportunity Trust	78,453
Overseas Development Institute (ODI)	2,040,608
OXFAM	13,838,676
Pattaya Orphanage Trust	18,110
Plan International	1,616,591
Plunkett Foundation	64,541
Population Concern	543,016
Project Ploughshare	39,999
Project Rehab Malawi	1,741
Prospect Burma	11,400
Red R	56,950
Refugee Council	8,892
Richmond Fellowship International	6,640
Rio Maza	14,742
RNIB	315
Royal Agricultural Society	4,537
Royal Botanic Gardens Kew	44,739
Royal Commonwealth Society	186,576
Ryder Cheshire Mission	82,000
South Africa Townships Health Fund	66,000
Salvation Army	82,010
Save The Children Fund	20,529,172
Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund	158,401
Scottish Crop Research Institute	60,685
Scottish Development Education Centre	7,250
Scottish Education Action for Development	30,002
Scottish Natural Heritage	9,954
Send A Cow	29,300
Sid-Vale Africa Link	1,415
Silsoe College	15,298
Silsoe Research Institute	593,185
Skillshare Africa	1,584,120
SOS Sahel International	777,156
Southeast Asian Outreach	84,959
TACADE	23,482
Tear Fund	857,474
Thomson Foundation	28,181
Tools for Self Reliance	14,790
Traidcraft Exchange	451,504
Trax Programme Support	27,579

1994–95 Direct grants to United Kingdom Non-governmental Organisations [1](excluding Eastern Europe)

Voluntary Organisation	*Amount of direct grant awarded in financial year [2]1994–95*
Tropical Health and Education Trust	64,949
Uganda Society for Disabled Children	104,703
UK Committee for UNICEF	2,910,287
UK Found for the Peoples of the South Pacific	225,963
UKJAID	2,475
United Nations Association Int Service	909,885
University of Warwick	27,104
VetAid	98,480
Village Service Trust	10,870
Vision Aid Overseas	29,737
Voluntary Service Overseas	18,208,167
War on Want	71,906
WaterAid	902,342
Wells for India	21,592
Womenkind	113,340
World Conservation Monitoring	67,163
World Conservation Union	37,563
World University Service	765,931
World Vision of Britain	2,371,522
World Wildlife Fund	2,100,774
Y-Care International	415,318
YES International	91,470
You and Me	32,700
Youth With A Mission	17,140
Zimbabwe Trust	61,600
Zoological Society of London	32,000
Totals	173,124,136

[1] Organisations registered as a charity with the Charity Commissioners in England or the Inland Revenue in Scotland.

[2] This represents expenditure channelled through NGOs for their own programmes and for development activities and emergency relief work undertaken on behalf of the Overseas Development Administration. It includes some research work where this is implemented by institutions which are within the definition of NGO given above.

1994–95 Direct payments to non-governmental organisations for work in eastern Europe

Voluntary organisation	*Amount of direct grant awarded in financial year 1994–95*
ADRA	27,700
Aga Khan Foundation	1,190,000
BEARR Trust	9,780
Bosnia Aid Comm of Oxford	50,000
Brit Helsinki Human Rights Group	1,557
British Institute International and Comparative Law	191,637
British Association of Central Eastern Europe	4,167
British Executive Service	397,558
British Hungarian Association	20,000
British Red Cross Society	1,825,270
CARE	190,180
Charities Aid Foundation	808,086
Charities Evaluation Services	15,823
Christian Aid	75,000
Elam Ministries	262,000
Fauna and Flora Preservation Society	2,200
Feed the Children	718,430
Help International	70,000
Institute of Development Studies	530

1994–95 Direct payments to non-governmental organisations for work in eastern Europe

Voluntary organisation	*Amount of direct grant awarded in financial year 1994–95*
Inter Action	45,000
International Waterfowl and Wetland Res	10,724
IPPF	59,861
Joint Mission Hospital Equipment Board	60,207
Marie Stopes International	567,700
Medecins Sans Frontieres	236,511
Medical Emergency Relief International	307,792
National Institute Agricultural Botany	143,265
National Trust	1,014
Ockenden Venture	34,000
OXFAM	1,102,500
Plunkett Foundation	367,812
Prison Reform International	9,453
Royal Agricultural College	26,435
Russian European Trust	8,656
Save The Children Fund	362,296
Scottish Agricultural College	301,627
Scottish Books for Romania	3,000
Scottish European Aid	213,700
Scottish Vocational Education Council	23,454
Silsoe Research Institute	35,811
Task Force Albania	25,200
Tear Fund	120,000
Thomson Foundation	311,958
UK Committee for UNICEF	1,100,000
University of Warwick	1,051
Voluntary Service Overseas	283,000
Warchild	97,000
Westminster Foundation for Democracy	16,729
World Conservation Monitoring	33,072
World Vision of Britain	200,000
World Wildlife Fund	2,600
YES International	18,309
Totals	11,989,655

Development Aid

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much development aid is spent on *(a)* a multilateral basis and *(b)* a bilateral basis; and what are the most recent projections for the allocation between bilateral and multilateral between 1995–96 and 1998–99. [9102]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) on 10 January, *Official Report* column *223–24*.

Multilateral Institutions

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those multilateral institutions with which Her Majesty's Government are in financial arrears. [8947]

Mr. Hanley: The UK is not in financial arrears to any of the multilateral development institutions of which it is a member.

Bilateral Aid

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of bilateral aid has been fully tied to the purchase of goods and services from the United Kingdom since 1990–91. [8872]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply I gave on 14 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *751*.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what requirements are made of NGOs to evaluate their programmes when receiving United Kingdom official aid. [8870]

Mr. Hanley: The Overseas Development Administration's joint funding scheme, JFS, is the principal channel of United Kingdom official aid for the development activities of UK NGOs.

NGOs in receipt of JFS support are required to undertake a degree of evaluation on all of their programmes. This takes the form of annual reports of progress, often supplemented by separate studies to evaluate the impact of their work.

Rwanda and Burundi

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has to increase assistance to *(a)* Rwanda and *(b)* Burundi. [9180]

Mr. Hanley: Since October 1993, Britain has committed £93 million and £2.6 million in bilateral emergency and rehabilitation assistance to Rwanda, including Rwandan refugees in neighbouring countries, and Burundi respectively. Future aid levels will reflect need, the capacity of NGOs and UN agencies to deliver assistance to those most at risk, and the absorptive capacity of the relevant Governments.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Preparation of Public Bills

41. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make a statement on the use of Parliamentary Counsel and private draftsmen and women in the preparation of Public Bills. [7483]

Mr. Newton: The Government and the House are, in my view, well served by Parliamentary Counsel in the preparation of legislation. As an experiment, to test the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of an alternative approach, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has employed private sector lawyers to draft parts of the Finance Bill currently before the House.

Prime Minister's Question Time

43. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what representations he has received regarding the length and format of Prime Minister's Question Time. [7486]

Mr. Newton: The Procedure Committee has produced a report on Prime Minister's questions which my right hon. Friend and I are studying.

Railtrack Privatisation

44. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he intends to bring forward proposals for legislation about the privatisation of Railtrack. [7487]

Mr. Newton: No further legislation is needed to complete the privatisation of Railtrack.

Lockerbie

45. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will set up a Select Committee to examine the on-going implications of the destruction of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie. [7488]

Mr. Newton: As I told the hon. Gentleman in my replies of 23 October 1995 and 27 November 1995, there are no plans to do so.

Written Parliamentary Questions

46. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what proposals he has to improve the procedure for obtaining answers to written parliamentary questions; and if he will make a statement. [7489]

Mr. Newton: If the hon. Gentleman has some particular proposal to make, perhaps he could let me know.

Parliamentary Procedures

47. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will introduce a procedure whereby hon. Members may briefly raise matters of interest without notice. [7490]

Mr. Newton: I have no plans to do so.

ENVIRONMENT

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much was spent on official hospitality by the Property Services Agency in 1993–94 and 1994–95; and what is projected for 1995–96. [9168]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information is as follows:

Expenditure in 1993–94 (excluding teas and coffees): £50,380.45

Expenditure in 1994–95 (excluding teas and coffees): £2,457.10

Estimated expenditure in 1995–96 (excluding teas and coffees): £117.51

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 22 November, *Official Report*, column *122*, if he will make a statement on the number of inquiries generated for each of the 14 energy efficiency products. [9128]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: As assessment will be carried out following the voucher book scheme's conclusion on 31 March.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many households were insulated under the home energy efficiency scheme in each of the past

five years; and what is his current estimate for *(a)* the present financial year and *(b)* 1996–97. [9529]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The home energy efficiency scheme began in January 1991. The total numbers of grants paid in Great Britain in each year since the scheme began, and estimated for the present financial year, are as follows:

Year	*Great Britain*
1990–91	7,582
1991–92[1]	167,849
1992–93	204,130
1993–94	270,148
1994–95	449,902
1995–96	[2]600,000

[1] From 1 January 1991.
[2] Estimate.

The allocation of funds for 1996–97 will enable at least 400,000 grants to be paid at the present mean value. However, additional resources will be available from contributions paid by eligible householders who are not on benefit after 1 April 1996. This means that the average job will cost less in grant because of the contribution, and considerably more than 400,000 jobs should be carried out.

Rents

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average rent paid by tenants of *(a)* private landlords and *(b)* local councils; and what were the equivalent figures in each category for 1978–79 in actual and real terms. [8529]

Mr. Curry: The figures are given in the table:

Average rents in England, 1978–79 and 1994–95

Year	*Local authority tenants £ a week*	*Private tenants £ a week*
1994–95 (actual)	[1]35.79	[2]69.00
1978–79 (actual)	[3]5.90	[4]6.70
1978–79 (1994–95 prices)	17.21	19.50

Source:
[1] Housing Subsidy Claim Form.
[2] Family Expenditure Survey.
[3] CIPFA survey of local authority rents.
[4] 1978 Private Renters Survey.

The 1978–79 estimates have been adjusted to 1994–95 prices using the GDP market prices deflator.

Estimates from the family expenditure survey and the 1978 private renters survey are subject to sampling variability.

Council Tax Valuation Appeals

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many appeals against council tax valuation banding have been received; and what percentages of these appeals have been *(a)* resolved, *(b)* withdrawn or *(c)* are still outstanding (i) nationally and (ii) by valuation office in the London region. [8973]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Valuation Office agency had received 1,046,969 valid banding proposals in England by 30 November 1995, of which 93.2 per cent. had been resolved, including 22.1 per cent. withdrawn, leaving 6.8 per cent. outstanding. Details for VOA London region offices are:

VOA local office	*Number received*	*Percentage resolved*	*Percentage withdrawn*	*Percentage outstanding*
Barking	5,079	90.9	37.0	9.1
Bromley	20,008	93.8	25.2	6.2
Camden	8,654	94.0	28.8	6.0
City	235	97.0	40.0	3.0
Ealing	10,724	93.3	25.5	6.7
Enfield	22,659	90.8	36.3	9.2
Greenwich	13,044	94.3	28.3	5.7
Harrow	11,348	91.4	26.0	8.6
Islington	10,173	93.6	25.1	6.4
Kensington	17,444	97.5	23.8	2.5
Lambeth	15,202	95.3	29.1	4.7
Redbridge	7,562	89.4	34.0	10.6
Tower Hamlets	4,594	89.6	26.3	10.4
Westminister	9,481	98.6	21.8	1.4
Wimbledon	14,374	96.9	25.8	3.1

Admiralty Arch

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration his Department has given to the future of Admiralty arch; which estate agent was employed to consider the sale of Admiralty arch; which independent advisers were involved in this decision; and if he will make a statement. [8992]

Sir Paul Beresford: Prior to, and since the relocation from the majority of the building by the Ministry of Defence, my Department has actively been canvassing use by other Departments and agencies. No estate agents have been employed to consider the sale of Admiralty arch but consultants, Knight Frank, have been commissioned to advise on the possible future uses of the property, including any private finance initiative opportunities. Their report is awaited.

Non-domestic Rates

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to amend the Non-domestic Rating (Unoccupied Property) Regulations 1989 (S.I. 1989 No. 2261) so that the benefit of the rate reduction can only be claimed by a landlord; and if he will make a statement. [9519]

Sir Paul Beresford: Liability for rates attaches to the beneficial occupier of the hereditament; or if it is empty, whoever is entitled to occupy it. Any benefit arising from empty property relief should therefore go to the same person who is liable for the rates, whether it be the owner, landlord, lessee or tenant.

We have no plans to change this.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what resources he will make available to authorities that have been or are to be reorganised on 1 April 1995, 1996, or 1997 for reorganisation costs incurred by them in 1996–97; and if he will make a statement. [9667]

Mr. Curry: On 20 October I invited authorities that have been or are to be reorganised on or before 1 April 1997 to submit estimates of the amount of expenditure they expect to incur on transitional costs of reorganisation in 1996–97. On the basis, *inter alia*, of the information provided by the authorities, I have decided the maximum amounts to allocate towards such costs in 1996–97. I have given priority to authorities to be reorganised in 1996. The majority of authorities to be reorganised in 1997 asked for allocations in respect of redundancy to be deferred until the mid-year review in October 1996 and the allocations listed, for those authorities, are not intended to cover redundancy costs.

The amounts are as follows:

Maximum amounts: £ thousand rounded

Authority	*1996–97*	*Cumulative total 1994–95, 1995–96 and 1996–97*
1995 Reorganisation		
Isle of Wight Council	500	4,437
1996 Reorganisations		
Hartlepool Borough Council	2,150	5,898
Redcar and Cleveland Council	3,400	6,037
Middlesbrough Borough Council	2,750	5,104
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council	3,250	6,678
North West Somerset Council	3,000	6,250
South Gloucestershire Council	3,500	5,300
North Lincolnshire Council	3,500	5,300
North East Lincolnshire Council	4,000	5,900
North Yorkshire County Council	400	1,400
Selby District Council	100	610
1997 Reorganisations		
Bedfordshire County Council	300	
Luton Borough Council	3,250	
Milton Keynes Borough Council	2,500	
Derbyshire County Council	300	
Derby City Council	2,500	
Bournemouth Borough Council	2,500	
Poole Borough Council	2,500	
Durham County Council	300	
Darlington Borough Council	2,500	
East Sussex County Council	300	
Brighton Borough Council	350	
Hove Borough Council	350	
Hampshire County Council	300	
Portsmouth City Council	2,500	
Southampton City Council	2,500	
Staffordshire County Council	300	
Stoke on Trent City Council	2,500	
Wiltshire County Council	100	
Thamesdown Borough Council	2,500	

Buckinghamshire and Dorset county councils did not submit bids. The councils of the East Riding of Yorkshire, Hull City, Bristol City, Bath and North-east Somerset and York district are being asked to reconsider whether the reorganisations in their area could be implemented more economically. If they submit revised bids by the end of January, they will be considered and allocations made during February.

I shall make a further announcement about allocations to authorities for which reorganisation orders have not yet been made.

Housing Association Tenants

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the results of the consultation exercise on the Government's proposals in respect of right-to-buy and purchase grants for tenants of housing associations and independent social landlords. [9698]

Mr. Curry: Following the publication of the housing White Paper, "Our Future Homes", over 3,000 copies of the consultation paper on purchase grants for housing association tenants were sent out to interested parties, and 341 responses have been received.

I have carefully considered the views of many housing associations that future HAG-funded properties should not be subject to the new right to buy. But the Government continue to believe that tenants ought to have this new right, and provision for this will appear in the forthcoming Housing Bill.

I have, however, decided to make a number of changes to the schemes as originally proposed in the light of the responses received. These changes are:

the exemption from the schemes of properties in all rural communities of less than 3,000 population, because of the particular difficulties in providing replacement properties;

replacement properties need not be new-build, but could be either rehabilitated existing stock or bought on the open market if this represents the best value for money;

associations will be allowed to offer tenants alternative properties from their stock, for which purchase grant will be available;

Housing Association grant repayment may be waived on all receipts from sales to tenants on condition that they go into the ring-fenced fund to provide replacement properties;

Large-scale voluntary transfer associations will be treated in the same way as other associations—that is they will not have to bear the burden of grant themselves, as originally proposed;

in the statutory scheme, associations—and other independent social landlords—will not be required to sell properties where the outstanding private sector debt is greater than the market value;

in the voluntary scheme, participating associations will not be required to sell where:

the property was built entirely by private donation or funds;

properties are subject to restrictive legal covenants or agreements;

the costs of acquisition and improvement (but not repair), or the outstanding private loan debt on the property, are greater than the market value.

I have deposited a list of responses to the consultation paper in the Libraries of both Houses, and copies of individual responses are available through them.

Red Lion Fireworks

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment to what destination the three container loads of Red Lion fireworks were re-exported on 23 September, referred to in his answer of 6 November, *Official Report*, column *602*. [8923]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Red Lion fireworks were re-exported on 23 September to Dublin.

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the performance and effectiveness of the Health and Safety Executive regarding the import of dangerous fireworks following the case of Kanash Ltd. and Red Lion. [8922]

Sir Paul Beresford: I consider that the Health and Safety Executive took appropriate enforcement action: Kanash complied fully with all the prohibitions placed upon it, and HSE ensured, subsequently, that all the recalled Red Lion brand fireworks were destroyed.

Inner-city Shops

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what plans he has to zero-rate inner-city shops; [8590]

(2) if he will make it his policy to select Hillfields in Coventry as a pilot area for zero-rating. [8595]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Government have no plans to zero rate inner-city shops.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many vacant shops there are in inner-city areas in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Coventry. [8592]

Sir Paul Beresford: We do not hold such information for England centrally.

As part of our advice on planning town centres and retail developments in planning policy and guidance note No. 6—PPG6—we advise local authorities to monitor vacant properties in their town centres. I understand that Coventry city council will shortly be publishing information about vacant shops in its unitary development plan.

The information relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends, the Secretaries of State for Wales, for Scotland and for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has received from organisations concerned with the blighting of inner-city areas and shopping centres. [8591]

Sir Paul Beresford: We occasionally receive correspondence about blight. Most of my correspondence on shopping centres relates to the damaging effects on them of out-of-centre and out-of-town shopping developments.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the difficulties of letting vacant shops in inner-city areas. [8594]

Sir Paul Beresford: None. This is primarily the responsibility of local regeneration partnerships, including local authorities.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many vacant shops have been deliberately damaged to avoid paying the business rate levy in the last two years. [8596]

Sir Paul Beresford: This information is not available.

Shops (Business Rates)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what plans he has to vary the business rate levy to reflect the ability of shop-owners to pay the business rate; [8597]

(2) what plans he has to change the business rate levy on vacant shops in inner-city areas. [8589]

Sir Paul Beresford: None.

Environmental Pollution Report

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what dates and on what matters, in connection with the 18th report of the Royal Commission on environmental pollution, "Transport and the Environment", he has made representations to the Secretary of State for Transport. [9093]

Sir Paul Beresford: There have been frequent contacts between my Department and the Department of Transport about the report since its publication in October 1994, including discussions at both ministerial and official levels.

Green Ministers

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will publish the minutes of the meetings of the Green Ministers; [8672]

(2) when the Green Ministers last met; who attended; and what issues were discussed; [8673]

(3) if he will publish a list of the contacts of green officials for each Government Department; [8674]

(4) if he will publish a regular six-monthly list of environmental appraisals by Government Departments. [8675]

Mr. Clappison: Green Ministers last met on 6 July 1995 and discussion included progress on priorities and targets in the 1995 "This Common Inheritance" annual report and possibilities for the 1996 report, indicators of sustainable development, quality in town and country and green housekeeping activities. Almost all Green Ministers attended or were represented at that meeting. A further meeting scheduled for 2 November had to be postponed and will now take place on 29 January. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will discuss then with colleagues whether minutes of meetings and a list of official contacts should be published.

The Government are committed to reporting further on the use of environmental appraisal in Government policy, but we have already published "Environmental Appraisal in Government Departments", a copy of which is in the House of Commons Library.

Housing Stock

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to introduce new measures to assist local authorities to tackle the maintenance problems of the housing stock. [9476]

Mr. Clappison: None. Local authorities have very substantial resources available to maintain their housing stock and they should ensure that they use this money effectively. About £2,320 million per year is being spent on the repair and maintenance of local authority housing, which in real terms is 86 per cent. more per dwelling than 16 years ago.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Parole

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what percentage of prisoners is currently notified of their parole decision after their parole eligibility date in respect of each prison; [7007]

(2) what plans he has to increase resources to *(a)* eliminate delays and *(b)* reduce the backlog of parole eligibility cases; [7009]

(3) what assessment he has made of *(a)* the cost and *(b)* the impact on prisoner morale of notifying prisoners of parole eligibility after their parole eligibility date. [7008]

Miss Widdecombe: Although parole delays cause an increase in the total number of prisoners in custody at any one time, the marginal cost for each establishment is low.

I do not think parole delays are acceptable. They are unfair to prisoners and an inefficient use of resources. I have asked officials to take steps to reduce the delays. The measures taken include: issuing an instruction to governors stressing the importance of completing parole dossiers on time and of avoiding the transfer of prisoners just before parole board interviews; giving the parole board extra temporary staff, and securing the appointment of sufficient parole board members to undertake interviews and panelling works.

Provisional figures for 1995 show that, for those establishments holding the majority of prisoners eligible for parole, the percentages of prisoners who received their parole decisions after their parole eligibility date, or its anniversary, are given in the table.

Prison	*Percentage of prisoners receiving late parole notifications*
Acklington	57
Albany	79
Ashwell	70
Askham Grange	58
Aylesbury	79
Belmarsh	79
Birmingham	79
Blantyre House	84
Blundeston	67
Bristol	55
Brockhill	82
Buckley Hall	76
Bullingdon	82
Camp Hill	72
Canterbury	89
Castington	38
Channings Wood	82
Coldingley	78
Dartmoor	81
Deerbolt	73
Dover	64
Downview	77
Durham	62
East Sutton Park	71
Elmley	78
Erlestoke	86
Everthorpe	86
Featherstone	81
Ford	71
Frankland	46
Full Sutton	55
Garth	72
Glen Parva	93
Grendon	68
Haverigg	69
Hewell Grange	93
Highdown	77
Highpoint	74
Hollesley Bay	86
Holme House	53
Huntercombe	70
Kirkham	86
Kirklevington	65
Lancaster	94
Latchmere House	83
Leeds	96
Leyhill	89
Lindholm	71
Liverpool	80
Littlehey	80
Long Lartin	82
Maidstone	77
Manchester	73
Moorland	69
The Mount	92
North Sea Camp	82
Nottingham	82
Parkhurst	76
Pentonville	100
Portland	91
Ranby	77
Risley	86
Rochester	76
Shepton Mallet	69
Stafford	87
Standford Hill	84
Stocken	85
Styal	77
Sudbury	85
Swaleside	56
Swinfen Hall	88
Usk	79
The Verne	69
Wakefield	89
Wandsworth	76
Wayland	78
Wealstun	68
Whatton	87
Whitemoor	81
Wymott	88

Correspondence

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Sunderland, South will receive a reply to his letter of 24 November regarding Alan and Michael Guy, Ref. 2235/95. [9062]

Mr. Kirkhope: My private secretary replied to the hon. Member's letter on 8 January. The allegations that Alan and Michael Guy were wrongfully convicted are currently being reviewed and I hope to be able to send the hon. Member a substantive reply to his letters about this case very soon.

Miscarriages of Justice

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the time taken to investigate each alleged miscarriage of justice considered by his Department in the last three years; and which of these were referred to the Court of Appeal; [7783]

(2) how many cases were referred to the Court of Appeal following investigation by his Department in each of the last 10 years. [7782]

Mr. Kirkhope: The number of cases referred in recent years to the Court of Appeal is given in the table:

References to the Court of Appeal under section 17(1)(a) of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968 in respect of conviction 1988–94

Year	*Cases*	*Defendants*
1988	3	6
1989	7	20
1990	10	12
1991	8	11
1992	8	9
1993	8	9
1994	9	12
1995	18	20

Detailed information about the time taken to consider individual cases is not available. During the past three years, it has taken, on average, about two months to consider a case, but the time taken varies considerably according to the extent and nature of inquiries which may need to be made. At the beginning of December 1995, there were 50 cases which had been under consideration for more than 12 months.

Doncaster Prison

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what considerations led to adjudication in respect of punishment of prisoners at Doncaster prison being carried out by Home Office controllers; and what assessment he has made of the effect on discipline at the prison. [8055]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 15 January 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the Office, to reply to your recent Question about adjudications at Doncaster prison being carried out by Controllers.

The Criminal Justice Act 1991 specifically prevents Directors of contracted-out prisons from carrying out adjudications. This function is instead carried out by Controllers, in accordance with section 85(3) of the Act. To change this provision would require legislation to amend the Act.

The power to adjudicate on prisoners is quasi-judicial and can, in some instances, mean detaining them in custody for longer as a consequence of a disciplinary award. In passing the 1991 Act Parliament has taken the view that only members of the judiciary and a limited number of state servants should have the power to take away a person's liberty.

The Chief Inspector of Prisons also considered this matter during his inspection of other contracted-out prisons, at Wolds and Blakenhurst. He felt that the current arrangements offered the best safeguards for prisoners at present.

There is no indication that discipline within the prison has been affected in any way by adjudications being carried out by the Controller.

Temporary Director General of the Prison Service

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what directions have been issued to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service as to the title he should append to his signature; and if he will make a statement. [8050]

Miss Widdecombe: No such directions have been issued.

Mobile Phones

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many mobile telephones have been supplied to his Department for in each of the last eight years; and in each of those years how many different suppliers were involved. [8041]

Mr. Howard: The number of mobile telephones supplied to my Department in the last three years was 180 in 1993, 209 in 1994 and 483 in 1995, from four, four, and eight suppliers respectively. In the previous five years, 829 mobile telephones were procured using three suppliers. The figures are approximate because they may not include some mobile telephones supplied to areas of my Department with devolved responsibility for the provision of telecommunications. More precise details would be available only at disproportionate cost.

Director General of the Prison Service

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures of performance will be included in the job description of the Director General of the Prison Service; and what *(a)* salary and *(b)* other emoluments their achievement will bring. [8128]

Mr. Howard: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 5 December, *Official Report*, column *204*.

Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994

Sir Michael Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times the powers in section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 have been used since they became available; and if he will publish information in respect of each of the police forces in England and Wales. [8219]

Mr. Maclean: Figures are not yet available. Statistics on the use of these powers will be published later this year and thereafter on an annual basis.

Immigration Service (Pay)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) for how long performance-related pay has been available to *(a)* executive officers, *(b)* higher executive officers and *(c)* other officials within the immigration service; and if he will make a statement; [8162]

(2) what criteria are used to judge the eligibility for performance-related pay of *(a)* executive officers, *(b)* higher executive officers and *(c)* other officials within the immigration service, in terms of (i) cash and (ii) proportion of overall salary; and if he will make a statement; [8163]

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what mechanisms exist to provide performance-related pay to *(a)* executive officers, *(b)* higher executive officers and *(c)* other officials within the immigration service; [8164]

(2) what is the upper limit of performance-related pay available to *(a)* executive officers, *(b)* higher executive officers and *(c)* other officials within the immigration service, in terms of (i) cash, and (ii) proportion of overall salary; [8165]

(3) when changes were last introduced to the system of provision of performance-related pay to *(a)* executive officers, *(b)* higher executive officers and *(c)* other officials within the immigration services; and what those changes were. [8166]

Mr. Howard: Arrangements for performance-related pay for executive grades, including immigration service staff, have been in place since April 1989 following negotiations between HM Treasury and the national unions. It is awarded for different levels of performance, assessed on the basis of markings in annual individual appraisal reports. There are currently three levels of reward for individuals, depending on whether their performance is judged to be fully satisfactory, significantly above requirements, or outstanding. The amount varies according to the overall performance marking attained and the point reached on the pay band. Lump sum non-consolidated payments are made to those on the maximum of their pay band.

Structural changes to the performance pay system were last made, across the whole of the civil service, in 1992. The previous mixed incremental/performance pay system was replaced by one in which pay is much more clearly performance related.

The arrangements in the Home Office are currently undergoing a major review, in the light of the impending delegation of pay responsibility from the Treasury.

Deportations (Algeria)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what decision he has made in respect of the deportation of Hocine Dib to Algeria; and if he will make a statement. [8244]

Mr. Kirkhope: Mr. Dib is an illegal entrant, rather than a person who is being dealt with under deportation powers. His case is being reviewed in the light of the recent decision of the Court of Appeal to grant him leave to move for a judicial review.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Algerians were deported from the United Kingdom in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994 and *(c)* 1995; and if he will make a statement. [8243]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is given in the table:

Algerian nationals removed from the United Kingdom under the deportation process[1]

Year	*Number of persons*
1993	65
1994	29
1995[2]	[3]13

[1] Including "voluntary" departures after deportation action had been initiated but excluding illegal entrants removed.
[2] January to September.
[3] Provisional figure.

British Citizenship

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each year since 1982 the number of children or minors born abroad and having as a parent a British citizen whom he or his predecessors have *(a)* registered or *(b)* refused to register as British citizens under section 3(1) of the British Nationality Act 1981. [8245]

Mr. Kirkhope: Records of the nationality of the parents of minors who apply for British citizenship or the number of applications under section 3(1) which are refused are not kept. The number of applications granted where the applicant was born abroad is as follows:

1983: 2,033
1984: 8,462
1985: 10,145
1986: 8,527
1987: 8,533
1988: 6,060
1989: 10,797
1990: 8,588
1991: 9,471
1992: 7,800
1993: 7,737
1994: 7,232
1995: 6,610

Environmental Pollution Report

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what dates and on what matters in connection with the 18th report of the Royal

Commission on environmental pollution, "Transport and the Environment", he has made representations to the Secretary of State for Transport; and if he will give further details of the dates and subjects of those representations. [9166]

Mr. Howard: I have made no representations to the Secretary of State for Transport on the 18th report of the Royal Commission on environmental pollution.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the figures for the number of asylum applicants in 1995 residing in Wales at the time of application, the figures for the success and failure of these applications, the number still to be determined and the number of appeals. [9078]

Mr. Kirkhope: Information on the places of residence of people currently seeking asylum is not held centrally.

Airline Passengers

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek to amend the Data Protection Act 1984 in order to permit the staff of airlines operating in the United Kingdom to give out information concerning passengers flying into or out of the United Kingdom, to next of kin who require confirmation or otherwise that a person has travelled with that airline. [9387]

Mr. Sackville: No amendment to the Data Protection Act is necessary. The Act permits disclosure of data to any category of person described as a potential recipient in the relevant entry in the data protection register. Whether an airline may disclose data to next of kin therefore depends on the terms in which it was registered. Only the airline can decide, in cases where disclosure is permissible, whether it would be appropriate to disclose in any given situation.

European Police Office

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the text of the convention concerning the establishment of a European police office, signed in Brussels on 26 July 1995, Cm 3050, was presented to Parliament by Her Majesty's Government; what notification of the terms of the convention was given to Select Committees of either House; and when he expects to lay the convention before Parliament for ratification. [8255]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 11 January 1996]:* The Europol convention was published, and laid before Parliament, on 8 December 1995.

An explanatory note on the then draft convention was submitted on 22 February 1994. Supplementary explanatory notes, with revised drafts of the convention, were provided on 17 November 1994 and 31 May 1995. The final text of the convention, together with an accompanying explanatory note, was forwarded on 28 July last year.

We expect to ratify the convention in the near future.

WALES

Executive Agencies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if answers sent to hon. Members in reply to parliamentary questions by the head of executive agencies in his Department are *(a)* seen, *(b)* approved and *(c)* amended by him before they are sent; and if he will identify any such letters to which amendments by him have been made in 1994–95. [7829]

Mr. Hague: For Cadw, Welsh Historic Monuments, parliamentary questions are passed to the chief executive for reply when the matter is one delegated to him under the agency's framework document. Ministers see a copy of the reply before it is sent, but would not normally intervene in operational matters. No letters were amended by Ministers in 1994–95.

Nursery Voucher Scheme

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received to date regarding the proposed nursery voucher scheme; how many of these representations voiced support for the scheme; and if he will make a statement. [8059]

Mr. Richards: Some 1,100 separate representations have been received to date, including some petitions and a large number of printed pro-forma letters organised by some primary schools. There has been general support for the Government's objective of making nursery education available for all four-year-olds, although no declared support amongst the representations for the proposed voucher scheme as the most appropriate means to achieve that objective. Many of the representations have clearly been generated by a misunderstanding of some basic elements of the scheme and the greater choice it will give parents in the type of provision they can have for their children, and by an unsubstantiated concern that it will inevitably reduce the current level of maintained sector provision. If local education authorities provide what parents want, there is nothing in the proposed voucher scheme to threaten their current levels of provision.

Urban Development Programme

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to clause 3.4 of the urban development guidelines of April 1992, if he will place in the Library a copy of the criteria for selection and forms of partnership for each of the Welsh Development Agency's joint ventures with local authorities as contained in the agency's urban development programme. [8221]

Mr. Hague: Paragraph 3.4 of the April 1992 guidelines required the WDA, in its programme submissions, to describe the criteria it used to select and prioritise the locations in which it would undertake urban development programme activities, and to describe the forms of partnership in terms of where, and with whom, the agency would work with other organisations to implement the programme.

Approved programmes covering 1992–93 and 1993–94, including broad criteria, details of locations and partnership arrangements, are summarised in publications by the agency, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

Agricultural Support

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the estimated amount of financial support received by the agricultural industry from *(a)* the European Union, *(b)* the United Kingdom Government and *(c)* in total in each year since 1990 at constant prices indicating each figure as a percentage of the corresponding total. [8088]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Details of financial support for agriculture in Wales are published in figure 2.01 of the Welsh Office departmental report and are broken down between Common agricultural policy commodity and domestic agricultural support.

These figures, together with their respective shares of the total, are shown in the table in constant 1990 prices for the financial years 1990–91 to 1994–95.

Financial support received by the agricultural industry in Wales

Constant prices (1990–91=100) £ million (per cent. of total)

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
CAP expenditure	58 (52)	85 (57)	99 (64)	146 (77)	156 (73)
Domestic expenditure	54 (48)	63 (43)	55 (36)	44 (23)	57 (27)
Total	112 (100)	148 (100)	154 (100)	190 (100)	213 (100)

1. Expenditure on domestic schemes include an element which is subsequently refunded by the EU. However, as refunds do not necessarily take place in the year in which the expenditure is incurred the annual figures are shown gross of refunds.
2. Expenditure figures for Wales are only available in respect of direct support. The figures therefore exclude variable premium payments and intervention support for which separate Welsh figures are unavailable. The variable premium scheme ended in January 1992 and intervention support has been reduced as a result of the 1992 CAP reforms. Thus in the early years of the series, total expenditure is understated and the proportion represented by domestic support expenditure is overstated.

Mostyn Docks

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will announce the outcome of the public inquiry relating to the expansion of Mostyn docks, Mostyn, Clwyd. [8579]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The application is being dealt with jointly by the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Transport. The inquiry dealt with a number of complex issues which are still under consideration and a decision will be issued as soon as possible.

Standard Spending Assessment

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is for each police authority in Wales the proposed standard spending assessment for 1996–97 and the standard spending assessment set for 1995–96 and each of the previous five years. [8577]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend announced on 30 November provisional standard spending assessment for 1996–97 for police authorities in Wales as shown as follows. The figures reflect changes in police authority boundaries from 1 April 1996.

Provisional SSA 1996–97

	£ million
Dyfed-Powys	24.3
Gwent	31.4
North Wales	34.7
South Wales	75.8

The SSAs for police authorities for 1995–96 are as follows:

SSA 1995–96

	£ million
Dyfed-Powys	23.4
Gwent	25.3
North Wales	33.3
South Wales	77.7

Prior to 1995–96, there were no SSAs for police authorities in Wales. County council SSAs included provision for the police.

Child Abuse

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if Miss Nicola Davies QC, in her examination of papers relating to child abuse in north Wales, asked for sight of any papers held by *(a)* the North Wales police and *(b)* the Crown Prosecution Service. [9203]

Mr. Richards: All of the agencies that were asked by the examining team to provide access to their papers did so. These were the North Wales police, and the county councils of Gwynedd and Clwyd.

Schools (Selection)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the schools in Wales which select pupils, giving the percentage selected in each school, and the criteria and procedures under which selection by each school is made. [9479]

Mr. Richards: In the maintained sector, admission arrangements, including the criteria by which decisions are to be made if a school is oversubscribed, must be published annually in the school's prospectus. I am not aware of any grant-maintained school that selects pupils on the basis of ability or aptitude. Information about local education authority maintained schools is not held centrally.

Housing Associations

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the results of the Welsh consultation exercise undertaken on the Government's proposals for purchase grants for tenants of housing associations. [9720]

Mr. Hague: Following the publication of the housing White Paper "Our Future Homes", more than 160 copies of the consultation paper on purchase grants for housing association tenants were sent out to interested parties, and 28 responses were received.

I have also taken into consideration responses received to my consultation on the rural White Paper where these referred to the purchase grant.

I have carefully considered the views of many housing associations that future housing association grant-funded properties should not be subject to the new right to buy, but the Government continue to believe that tenants ought to have this new right, and provision for this will appear in the forthcoming Housing Bill.

I have, however, decided to make a number of changes to the scheme as originally proposed in the light of the responses received. These changes are: the exemption from the scheme of properties in certain rural areas, on which I propose to consult in due course; replacement properties need not be new build, but could be either rehabilitated or bought on the open market if this represents better value for money; in the statutory scheme, associations and other independent social landlords will not be required to sell properties where the outstanding private sector debt is greater than the market value; associations will be allowed to offer tenants other properties from their stock for which purchase grant will be available; housing association grant repayment may be waived on all receipts from sales to tenants on condition that they go into a ring-fenced fund to provide replacement properties; any future large scale voluntary transfer associations will be treated in the same way as other associations—they will not have to bear the burden of grant themselves, as originally proposed; in the voluntary scheme, participating associations will not be required to sell where the property was built entirely by private donation or funds, where properties are subject to restrictive legal covenants or agreements or where the costs of acquisition and improvement, but not repair, or the outstanding private loan debt on the property, are greater than the market value.

I have deposited a list of responses to the consultation paper in the Libraries of both Houses, and copies of individual responses are available through them.

Government Expenditure

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales pursuant to paragraph 3.8 of "Government Expenditure and Revenue—Wales 1993–94," published on 8 January 1995, if he will give the Welsh share of United Kingdom public expenditure on the basis of *(a)* the attribution of defence expenditure, *(b)* Wales's share of defence equipment expenditure and of United Kingdom based armed forces and *(c)* MOD civilian personnel; and if he will give the 1993–94 figure for MOD expenditure in Wales on the above basis corresponding to the £968 million used in table 6 of his publication. [9184]

Mr. Hague: Defence expenditure on behalf of Wales in 1993–94 has been estimated at £968 million by apportioning Wales's share of total UK defence expenditure on the basis of GDP. This is the basis used in the report "Government Expenditure and Revenue—Wales 1993–94". Apportioning defence expenditure on a population basis would place the figure at £1,143 million. Everyone in the UK benefits from total UK defence spending. The valuation of these benefits to people in Wales—as estimated—is a different question from the value of defence services purchased from within Wales. Only partial information on the latter is available. Figures published by the Ministry of Defence in the 1995 edition of "UK Defence Statistics" indicate that expenditure on equipment in Wales in 1993–94 was £50 million, or 1 per cent. of the UK total. At 1 July 1993 some 5,100 services personnel, or 2.5 per cent. of the UK total, and 5,000 civilian personnel, around 4 per cent. of the UK total, were deployed in Wales. An accurate allocation of costs to personnel on a regional basis could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on the same basis as was used in his publication "Government Expenditure and Revenue—Wales 1993–94", if he will give the Welsh share of United Kingdom public expenditure for each year since 1979 and the Welsh share of revenue arising. [8737]

Mr. Hague: The analysis carried out in relation to 1993–94 has not been done for earlier years and so directly comparable figures are not available. However, details of identifiable general Government expenditure in Wales are published each year by the Treasury in the statistical supplement to the Autumn Statement, copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many civil service personnel hours were spent in preparing the document "Government Expenditure and Revenue—Wales 1993–94". [8739]

Mr. Hague: The total time taken to prepare the report is estimated at around 150 person-hours.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the total cost of preparing and publishing the document "Government Expenditure and Revenue—Wales 1993–94". [8738]

Mr. Hague: The total cost of preparing and publishing the report is estimated at around £5,000.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on the same basis as was used in his publication "Government Expenditure and Revenue—Wales 1993–94" what estimate he has made of the length of time required on current Government regional development policies to bring tax receipts in Wales up to the United Kingdom average. [8736]

Mr. Hague: None.

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the mitigation measures on the Gwent levels corresponding to the loss of feeding grounds arising from the Cardiff bay barrage project. [8741]

Mr. Hague: I hope to make an announcement shortly.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much was spent on official hospitality by agencies associated with his Department in 1993–94, 1994–95 and projected for 1995–96. [9083]

Mr. Hague: Hospitality expenditure for Cadw is as follows:

1993–94: £2,248

1994–95: £1,734

1995–96: £1,500 projected.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 14 December, *Official Report*, column 779, if the figures for hospitality spending 1994–95 and 1995–96 includes spending by his Department's agencies. [9084]

Mr. Hague: No.

Emergency Medical Admissions

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the closure of all south Wales hospitals for emergency medical admissions on Monday 8 January. [8735]

Mr. Hague: While under heavy pressure following a period of severe weather and high levels of staff sickness, hospitals in south Wales coped with the demand for emergency treatment, and I understand that no patient requiring emergency care was refused admission on 8 January. I thank all the dedicated staff involved for their commitment and effort during a difficult period.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will carry out a review of the availability of emergency medical admission beds in Welsh hospitals; if he will arrange that such a review covers the impact of influenza, bronchitis and other conditions on staff and patients and the seasonal pattern thereof; and what allowance should be made for such peaks and troughs in calculating the overall supply of medical emergency beds. [8742]

Mr. Hague: My officials met leading NHS managers and clinicians on 7 December to assess the extent and possible causes of the increasing pressure on acute hospitals posed by the rise in emergency medical admissions. It was agreed that the NHS should develop as a matter of urgency an effective response to these pressures, both in the short and long term. An action plan was agreed before Christmas.

NHS representatives are meeting on 17 January to review the way in which the service responded to the unusual set of pressures faced over the Christmas and early new year period, and to consider in the light of this experience whether the existing action plan needs to be revised.

I will be receiving a copy of their report and will continue to monitor the position on emergency admissions very closely indeed.

Salford University Business Services Ltd.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the cost of the contract given to Salford University Business Services Ltd. to act as recruitment consultants to recruit innovation and technology counsellors to provide business contact services in Wales. [9179]

Mr. Hague: Salford University Business Services Ltd. has been awarded a contract worth £20,750 to manage the pan-Wales recruitment of innovation and technology counsellors to Business Connect, Wales.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what *(a)* guidelines and *(b)* other advice has been issued by his Department to (i) NHS bodies and (ii) other organisations regarding the use of the private finance initiative. [9079]

Mr. Hague: Detailed guidance on the private finance initiative was issued to the NHS in Wales—under the cover of a letter numbered DGM (95)112, in July 1995. A copy of this guidance has been placed in the Library of the House. Guidance on information management and technology projects within the NHS is being prepared.

The Treasury handbook "Private Opportunity, Public Benefit" is being distributed widely in Wales and this will build on the general advice that has already been provided.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which capital projects are currently being considered under the private finance initiative; and what is the cost of each project. [9057]

Mr. Hague: The estimated capital value of each of the projects being looked at currently, which have been announced, are as follows: M4 relief road, £330 million; A465 Heads of the Valleys road, £175 million; eastern bay link of the Cardiff peripheral distributor road, £108 million; new general hospital at Baglan, £40 million; staff residential accommodation, district general hospital, Llantrisant, £3 million; day surgery unit and mental health development, Nevill Hall, Abergavenny, £7 million; cancer treatment centre, Glan Clwyd district general hospital, Rhyl, £15 million; community hospital, Chepstow, £6 million; replacement of radiotherapy equipment, Velindre, £4 million; OSIRIS, office automation system for Welsh Office, £13 million.

Information on schemes costing less than £1 million is not collected.

Pembrokeshire NHS Trust

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library a copy of the auditor's report produced by Coopers and Lybrand, Cardiff into the circumstances leading up to, and the financial implications of, the departure of the chief executive of the Pembrokeshire NHS trust in 1994. [8586]

Mr. Richards: We have not received any such report. If one is received, we will place a copy in the Library of the House, provided that legal considerations do not prevent us from doing so.

Blood Shortage

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many surgical patients, broken down as to in-patients and day cases, had their operations *(a)* cancelled or

(b) transferred to English hospitals as a result of the blood transfusion shortage since 8 December 1995; and if he will make a statement. [8734]

Mr. Hague: Information on patients being transferred to England is not held centrally. No emergency operations were cancelled in Welsh hospitals; only those patients requiring group O blood had operations deferred. This was for a limited period of 48 hours.

IMAX Theatre Project

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement in relation to the funding of the IMAX theatre project of the national museum of Wales. [8740]

Mr. Hague: The national museums and galleries of Wales's corporate plan 1995–96 to 1999–2000 discusses museum developments in Cardiff bay, including the possible development of an IMAX theatre. No specific proposals have been submitted to the Welsh Office. The Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West, (Mr. Richards), has made it clear to the museum that any request by the museum for funding towards an IMAX project would not be agreed to.

Mortality Rates

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will establish an inquiry into the changes in *(a)* the perinatal, *(b)* the neonatal and *(c)* the infant mortality rates in Wales between 1993 and 1994. [9527]

Mr. Hague: No. Despite an increase of 14 deaths between 1993 and 1994 the trend is still clearly downward.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what information he has on perinatal, neonatal and infant mortality rates in other European countries in 1993 and 1994; [9524]

(2) what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the use of perinatal, neonatal and infant mortality rates in other European countries as comparators for the Welsh statistics; and if he will make a statement. [9523]

Mr. Hague: The information is contained in the following tables, taken from "Demographic Statistics 1995" published by Eurostat. A copy of this document is available in the Library of the House. No figures are available for 1994.

I have not commissioned or evaluated research on the use of perinatal, neonatal and infant mortality rates in other European countries as comparators for the Welsh statistics. However, comparisons of infant mortality rates between the United Kingdom and other countries are compiled, evaluated and published by the appropriate international organisation, in particular the World Health Organisation and Eurostat.

The figures published for Wales in "Health Statistics Wales" show that despite a small increase in deaths between 1993 and 1994 the trend is still clearly downward. The increase last year may not in itself be significant, although we do keep the situation under review.

The figures from 1990–94 show an overall reduction in the rate of infant mortality—the number of deaths per 1,000 live births—from 6.9 to 6.1. The figures published by various international organisations indicate that this is one of the lowest rates in Europe, and a figure of which Wales should be proud.

G-12: Infant mortality rate

(per 1000 live births)

	1960	*1965*	*1970*	*1975*	*1980*	*1985*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
EUR 15	34.5	27.5	23.4	18.1	12.4	9.5	8.4	8.0	7.6	7.4p	6.9p	6.5p
B	31.2	23.7	21.1	16.1	12.1	9.8	9.0	8.7	8.0	8.2p	8.2p	8.0p
DK	21.5	18.7	14.2	10.4	8.4	7.9	7.6	8.0	7.5	7.3	6.6	5.4
D	35.0	24.1	22.5	18.9	12.4	9.1	7.6	7.5	7.0	6.9	6.2	5.8
GR	40.1	34.3	29.6	24.0	17.9	14.1	11.0	9.7	9.7	9.0	8.4	8.5
E	43.7	37.8	28.1	18.9	12.3	8.9	8.0	7.8	7.6	7.2	7.1	6.9p
F	27.5	22.0	18.2	13.8	10.0	8.3	7.8	7.5	7.3	7.3	6.8	6.4p
IRL	29.3	25.2	19.5	17.5	11.1	8.8	8.9	8.1	8.2	7.6	6.7	6.0
I	43.9	36.0	29.6	21.2	14.6	10.5	9.3	8.7	8.2	8.1	8.3p	7.3p
L	31.5	24.0	24.9	14.8	11.5	9.0	8.7	9.9	7.3	9.2	8.5	6.0
NL	17.9	14.4	12.7	10.6	8.6	8.0	6.8	6.8	7.1	6.5	6.3	6.3
A	37.5	28.3	25.9	20.5	14.3	11.2	8.1	8.3	7.8	7.5	7.5	6.5
P	77.5	64.9	55.5	38.9	24.3	17.8	13.1	12.2	11.0	10.8	9.3	8.7
FIN	21.0	17.6	13.2	10.0	7.6	6.3	6.1	6.0	5.6	5.9	5.2	4.4
S	16.6	13.3	11.0	8.6	6.9	6.8	5.8	5.8	6.0	6.2	5.3	4.8
UK	22.5	19.7	18.5	16.1	12.1	9.3	9.0	8.4	7.9	7.4	6.6	6.3p
IS	13.0	15.0	13.2	12.5	7.7	5.7	6.2	5.5	5.9	5.5	4.8	4.8
FL	21.1	22.8	11.8	6.5	7.6	10.7	4.8	—	—	—	10	—
N	18.9	16.8	12.7	11.1	8.1	8.5	8.3	7.9	7.0	6.4	5.9	5.1
EEA	34.4	27.4	23.3	18.0	12.4	9.5	8.4	8.0	7.6	7.4p	6.9p	6.5p
CH	21.1	17.8	15.1	10.7	9.1	6.9	6.8	7.3	6.8	6.2	6.4	5.6

G-13: Neonatal mortality rate

	1960	*1965*	*1970*	*1975*	*1980*	*1985*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
EUR 15	—	—	—	12.6	8.3	6.0	5.1	4.8	4.5	4.4p	—	—
B	20.4	16.0	14.2	11.7	7.5	5.8	5.1	4.2	4.2	4.3p	—	—
DK	16.1	14.7	11.0	8.0	5.6	4.7	4.6	4.7	4.6	4.2	4.1	3.5
D	23.2	—	17.2	13.4	8.1	5.3	4.2	4.2	3.7	3.5	3.4	3.1
GR	19.5	19.8	19.6	18.0	13.9	10.6	8.1	6.6	6.5	6.1	5.7	6.1

G-13: Neonatal mortality rate

	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
E	20.2	20.0	17.5	12.6	8.5	5.9	5.2	5.1	5.0	4.6	4.6p	—
F	17.7	15.3	12.7	9.1	5.8	4.6	4.1	3.8	3.6	3.5	3.3	—
IRL	20.4	17.2	12.8	12.0	6.7	5.3	5.3	4.8	4.8	5.0	4.3	4.0
I	23.9	22.5	20.6	16.1	11.3	8.2	7.3	6.8	6.3	6.2	—	—
L	19.1	16.3	16.8	9.5	5.3	2.9	4.1	6.4	4.3	5.0	4.1	3.4
NL	13.5	11.4	9.5	7.6	5.7	5.0	4.6	4.6	4.8	4.6	4.4	4.5
A	—	—	—	15.5	9.4	7.1	4.8	4.9	4.4	4.4	4.7	3.7
P	27.9	25.4	24.3	22.1	15.5	12.2	8.6	8.1	7.0	6.9	6.0	5.6
FIN	14.4	13.6	10.5	7.8	5.1	4.3	3.9	4.1	3.7	4.2	3.7	3.0
S	—	—	9.1	6.4	5.0	4.2	3.7	3.7	3.5	3.6	3.3	3.1
UK	16.0	13.4	12.5	10.9	7.7	5.3	4.9	4.7	4.5	4.4	4.3	4.2p
IS	9.2	10.6	10.2	8.9	6.0	3.6	4.1	3.3	4.0	2.9	3.7	2.8
FL	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
N	11.7	11.9	9.5	7.3	5.1	4.7	4.5	3.9	3.9	3.7	3.8	3.5
EEA	—	—	—	12.6	8.3	6.0	5.1	4.8	4.5	4.4p	—	—
CH	16.1	13.8	10.9	7.4	5.9	4.5	4.2	4.4	3.8	3.6	3.9	3.5

G-17: Perinatal mortality rate

	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
EUR 15	—	—	—	20.3	14.1	10.8	9.2	8.8	8.3	8.1p	—	—
B	31.9	27.3	23.3	20.0	14.1	10.8	9.7	9.1	8.9	8.3p	—	—
DK	26.2	23.9	17.9	13.3	8.9	8.1	8.7	9.1	8.3	7.9	8.1	7.4
D	31.2	25.3	25.3	18.8	12.1	8.4	7.0	6.8	6.3	5.8	5.8	5.4
GR	26.4	29.4	27.4	25.5	20.3	15.7	12.9	12.1	11.9	11.1	10.0	10.9
E	—	—	—	20.9	14.4	10.9	8.8	8.2	7.6	7.2	7.3	—
F	31.4	27.9	23.3	18.1	12.9	10.7	9.2	8.9	8.3	8.2	7.7	—
IRL	37.7	30.0	24.3	21.5	14.8	12.3	11.3	10.3	10.1	9.5	9.3p	—
I	41.9	36.5	31.2	24.2	17.8	13.5	12.1	11.0	10.5	10.4	—	—
L	32.2	30.6	24.7	16.0	9.8	7.8	7.1	9.0	6.9	9.6	7.7	6.3
NL	26.6	23.1	18.6	13.9	11.1	9.8	9.1	9.6	9.6	9.1	9.1	9.1
A	—	—	—	21.2	14.1	10.1	7.3	7.6	6.9	6.5	6.8	6.1
P	41.1	38.6	36.5	31.3	23.9	21.5	16.6	16.3	14.2	13.7	11.9	10.2
FIN	27.5	24.5	17.0	12.4	8.4	7.3	6.5	6.4	6.2	6.8	5.9	5.1
S	—	—	16.4	11.3	8.8	7.4	6.9	6.6	6.5	6.6	5.8	5.9
UK	33.5	27.7	23.7	19.8	13.4	9.9	8.7	8.3	8.1	8.1	7.7	9.1p
IS	19.7	24.0	18.5	15.6	8.8	5.2	7.5	4.2	6.3	4.6	6.7	4.1
FL	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
N	23.7	21.4	19.1	14.1	11.1	9.1	7.8	7.6	7.5	7.4	7.4	6.9
EEA	—	—	—	20.3	14.1	10.8	9.2	8.8	8.3	8.1p	—	—
CH	25.6	22.8	18.1	13.4	9.5	8.3	7.2	7.8	7.7	7.1	7.0	6.8

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has on the *(a)* perinatal, *(b)* neonatal and *(c)* infant mortality rates in Wales in (i) the first quarter and (ii) the first half of 1995; and if he will place that information in the Library. [9528]

Mr. Hague: The information, provided by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, is in the following table. All the data are provisional:

	First quarter of 1995	*First half of 1995*
Perinatal mortality rate (per 1,000 live and still births)	7.3	7.0
Neonatal mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	3.9	3.6
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	6.0	5.4

Hospital Out-patients (Travel Expenses)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many hospital out-patients received refunds of fares or other travel expenses to Welsh hospitals in 1994–95; how many were *(a)* paid directly by the hospital payments office and *(b)* reimbursed subsequently by (i) the family health services authority and (ii) the Benefits Agency; and what was the average wait for reimbursement. [9526]

Mr. Hague: This information is not held centrally.

Cervical Cytology

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the reason for the omission of statistics for women in Mid-Glamorgan in table 4.4 of "Health Statistics Wales 1995;" and if he will make a statement. [9525]

Mr. Hague: Mid-Glamorgan family health services authority was unable to supply the relevant information for 1994–95. This was due to computer problems.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give for 1994–95 for each family health services authority the numbers of cervical smears the results of which were *(a)* negative, *(b)* inadequate sample for proper reading, *(c)* borderline, *(d)* mild dyskariosis, *(e)* moderate dyskariosis, *(f)* severe dyskariosis, *(g)* possible invasive changes and *(h)* glandular neoplasia. [9531]

Mr. Hague: The requested information could not be produced within the time available. I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as the information is available.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of jobs that will be lost in the Arfan borough area as a direct benefit of the reorganisation of local government. [9388]

Mr. Hague: I have made no such estimate. Any reduction in staffing will depend on decisions taken by the new councils which replace those based on the Arfon area.

Head Teachers' Salaries

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the highest salary paid to any local education authority head teacher of (i) an infants, (ii) a primary and (iii) a high school. [9067]

Mr. Robin Squire: I have been asked to reply.

The highest known salaries at 31 March 1994 of full-time head teachers in the local education authority maintained sector are:

Type of school	*England* £	*Wales* £
Nursery	36,900	25,400
Infant	39,900	29,400
Other primary	43,800	34,400
Secondary	60,500	50,700

Notes:
1. Including any allowances.
2. The salary details are derived from information provided by local authorities primarily for pensions purposes. Information may be incomplete in some cases.
3. Teachers in grant-maintained schools are not included.
4. Excludes head teachers in sixth form colleges.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the average salary of a (i) nursery, (ii) infant, (iii) primary and (iv) high school head teacher. [9066]

Mr. Squire: I have been asked to reply.

The average salaries at 31 March 1994 of full-time head teachers in the maintained sector are shown.

Type of school	*England* £	*Wales* £	*England and Wales* £
Nursery	24,600	24,000	24,500
Infant	27,000	25,600	26,000
Other primary	27,200	25,600	27,000
Secondary	37,000	37,400	37,100

1. Including any allowances.
2. The average salary is derived from information provided by local authorities and grant-maintained schools primarily for pensions purposes. Information may be incomplete in some cases.
3. Excludes head teachers in sixth form colleges.

SCOTLAND

Ministerial Travel and Accommodation Costs

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the total cost for himself and other departmental Ministers for each year since 1991–92, including the current year of *(a)* overseas travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers and their advisers, *(b)* car and chauffeuring expenses of Ministers, *(c)* ministerial security costs and *(d)* domestic travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers. [6414]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information on expenditure in the format requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Private Training Companies

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the criteria under which private training companies in Scotland may participate in schemes financed by the European social fund. [8098]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: A private sector company can participate only as a contractor to a public sector sponsor of a scheme financed by the European social fund.

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the privately owned training firms in Scotland which have taken part in schemes financed by the European social fund in the last two years; and how much they were paid. [8099]

Mr. Forsyth: Public sector sponsors of schemes for which finance is sought from the European social fund are not required to state on their application whether any contractors which they use are privately owned.

Local Income Tax

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration he has given to introducing a local income tax in Scotland. [6765]

Mr. Kynoch: None.

Youth Training (Accidents)

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* fatal, *(b)* major and *(c)* minor accidents took place on youth training schemes in Scotland in (i) July to September 1993, (ii) October to December 1993, (iii) January to March 1994, (iv) April to June 1994, (v) July to September 1994, (vi) October to December 1994, (vii) January to March 1995, (viii) April to June 1995 and (ix) July to September 1995; and what were the numbers of accidents on training for work for the same periods. [6481]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* The information requested is set out in the table:

	Fatal	*Major*	*Minor*
Youth training			
July-September 1993	0	4	41
October-December 1993	1	4	36
January-March 1994	1	12	34
April-June 1994	0	18	56
July-September 1994	0	11	38
October-December 1994	0	10	42
January-March 1995	0	6	45
April-June 1995	0	4	18
July-September 1995	0	6	39
Training for work			
July-September 1993	0	1	19
October-December 1993	0	3	14
January-March 1994	0	1	16
April-June 1994	0	1	15
July-September 1994	0	4	5
October-December 1994	0	2	18

	Fatal	Major	Minor
January-March 1995	0	2	9
April-June 1995	0	2	8
July-September 1995	0	0	16

Abortion

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many abortions in total have now been performed in Scotland under the provisions of the Abortion Act 1967; how many and what percentage of that total were performed in an emergency to save the life of the mother; and if he will give a breakdown by region of that total and the relevant figures and percentages. [6795]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 18 December 1995]:* The total number of therapeutic abortions performed in Scotland from 1968–1994 was 222,651. During this period 17 abortions, 0.01 per cent., were performed in an emergency to save the life of the pregnant woman. A breakdown by health board of residence is shown in the table.

Health board of residence	*Total number of abortions*	*Performed in emergency*[1]	*Percentage of total*
Argyll and Clyde	14,948	1	0.01
Ayrshire and Arran	13,604	0	0.00
Borders	3,528	0	0.00
Dumfries and Galloway	5,245	4	0.08
Fife	15,960	0	0.00
Forth Valley	9,872	1	0.01
Grampian	27,475	2	0.01
Greater Glasgow	36,419	1	0.00
Highland	9,828	3	0.03
Lanarkshire	17,094	0	0.00
Lothian	42,148	3	0.01
Orkney	580	0	0.00
Shetland	639	0	0.00
Tayside	23,869	2	0.01
Western Isles	526	0	0.00
Outwith Scotland/NK	916	0	0.00
Total	222,651	17	0.01

[1] Abortions performed under Statutory ground F—i.e., where in the case of emergency it was necessary to save the life of the pregnant woman.
1. 1994 data are provisional.

Nurses

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland by what means he assesses the demand for conversion courses for second level registered nurses. [8343]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 10 January 1996]:* It is for NHS trusts to determine the qualifications and number of staff they require and to arrange conversion courses for second level nurses to meet these needs.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many pre-registration nursing and midwifery students commenced training as initial entrants by means of *(a)* salaried students places, *(b)* Project 2000 and *(c)* undergraduate study for each of the last five years; [8348]

(2) how many pre-registration nursing and midwifery students who commenced training as initial entrants by means of *(a)* salaried student places, *(b)* Project 2000 and *(c)* undergraduate study, gave up their training in (i) the first year, (ii) the second year and (iii) the third year for each of the last five years; [8347]

(3) how many pre-registration nursing and midwifery students who commenced training as initial entrants by means of *(a)* salaried student places, *(b)* Project 2000 and *(c)* undergraduate study, (i) qualified and (ii) registered with the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for each of the last five years; [8345]

(4) how many pre-registration nursing and midwifery students who commenced training as initial entrants by means of *(a)* salaried student places, *(b)* Project 2000 and *(c)* undergraduate study, gave up their courses for each year of training for each of the last five years. [8346]

Mr. Forsyth *[holding answer 10 January 1996]:* This information is not held centrally.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the number of nurses working in *(a)* private nursing homes, *(b)* private hospitals, *(c)* local authorities, *(d)* private residential homes, *(e)* the armed forces, *(f)* the prison service, *(g)* the occupational health service, *(h)* private industry, *(i)* self employment and *(j)* and other categories; and if he will express the figures in terms of (i) total numbers and (ii) whole time equivalents for each of the last five years. [8350]

Mr. Forsyth *[holding answer 10 January 1996]:* The information available is shown in the table:

Qualified nursing staff in selected areas of employment

Area of employment	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
(a) Registered nursing homes[1]					
Number	4,498	5,314	6,048	6,022	[7]7,211
WTE[2]	3054.8	3686.0	4304.2	4538.3	[7]5985.1
(b) Private hospitals[1,3]					
Number	328	356	393	293	[7]216
WTE[2]	280.8	279.7	326.8	246.5	[7]167.5
(c) Local authorities[4]					
Number	661	772	770	870	n/a

Qualified nursing staff in selected areas of employment

Area of employment	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
(j) NHS in Scotland[1]					
Number	42,121	42,259	41,571	41,679	41,871
WTE	35,576.3	35,454.7	35,270.2	35,381.4	35,586.4
GP practice[6]					
Number	1,065	1,151	1,249	1,291	1,349
WTE	646.6	695.3	747.9	768.2	808.4

Notes:
[1] Data for year ending 31 March.
[2] Estimated.
[3] Complete information from private hospitals is not available for 1994 and 1995.
[4] Data include only those whose main qualification is in nursing (thereby excluding those whose main qualification is nursery nursing). Data are at 1 October.
[5] Comprises registered and enrolled nurses; excludes nurse teachers, nurses in training and students on "1992" courses in nursing and midwifery. Data at 30 September (1995 data at 31 March).
[6] Data refer to 1 April with the exception of staff in full fundholding practices in Grampian Health Board for whom expenditure was met from the Practice Staff Scheme, for whom data are as at the date on which the practice became a full fundholder. Excludes staff in fundholding practices in Fife health Board.
[7] Provisional.
n/a Not available.
Source:
National Manpower Statistics Forms ISD(s)34 and ISD(M)8
Information and Statistics Division
The Scottish Office Department of Health (Social Work Services Group)

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how he intends to estimate demand for nurses from the non-NHS sector; and how this information will be used to regulate the supply of nursing students. [8340]

Mr. Forsyth *[holding answer 10 January 1996]:* As part of the new arrangements for contracting for pre-registration nursing and midwifery education, and annual exercise is being undertaken to determine an indication of future requirements for such qualified employees in Scotland. This includes assessment of the needs of the non-NHS sector by conducting research through NHS purchasers and other relevant organisations. The forecast of future demand for nursers and midwives emerging from this work will be used to inform decisions on the number of pre-registration places in diploma level nursing and midwifery education by means of a new work force planning model which is being developed.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total number of second level registered nurses; and how many are currently undertaking training to convert to first level registration. [8344]

Mr. Forsyth *[holding answer 10 January 1996]:* There were 8,832 second level registered nurses employed in the NHS in Scotland at 30 September 1994 and 325 undertaking training to convert to first level registration at 31 December 1995.

Health Service Planning

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what studies his Department has undertaken into work force planning in the last five years. [8342]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 10 January 1996]:* For medical and dental NHS staff, the Scottish Office has each year asked employers how many new consultant posts they plan to set up in the next five years, and on this basis has calculated the number of senior posts in each specialty.

For nurses and midwives, an exercise was undertaken in 1994 to establish the required intakes for the five-year period commencing 1996 for the purposes of central purchasing of pre-registration education. the intake figures are subject to periodic review.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the cost of running his departmental office, and that of his predecessor, for each year since 1990–91 including the current year, broken down into *(a)* telephone bills, *(b)* total staff costs, *(c)* press and communications, *(d)* entertainment, *(e)* alcoholic drinks, *(f)* non-alcoholic drinks, *(g)* stationery, *(h)* office refurbishment and *(i)* other. [6413]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information on expenditure in the format requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what statement he has made of the consequence for Scotland of the reduction in funding for the home energy efficiency scheme. [8070]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: None. Within the new total it is expected that the current number of grants paid to householders receiving income-related benefit will be maintained.

Central European Time

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the consequences for Scotland of a move to central European time; and if he will make a statement. [8097]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Scottish Office statisticians have over the last 12 months undertaken substantial work to examine the likely effect of a move to CET on accident casualties. Preliminary results, which

will be published shortly, will show that a change to CET would be broadly neutral in terms of the total number of road accident casualties in Scotland. The work is based on up-to-date analysis of Scottish accident data over a recent five-year period. It takes account of prevailing light conditions at over 20 locations in Scotland and the time of day when accidents took place.

TRANSPORT

British Rail Pension Schemes

11. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the Minister for Public Transport's statement to Standing Committee B on 22 April 1993, column 1289, about the British Railways additional superannuation schemes, if it is the Government's intention that private sector employers should continue to make matching contributions on behalf of former BR employees who were contributing to Brass and receiving matching contributions at the time of their transfer to the private sector. [7452]

Mr. John Watts: Yes. Existing Brass employer contributions must be matched by new employers.

Robin Hood Line

12. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the Robin Hood line to be completed; and if he will make a statement. [7453]

Mr. Norris: The Robin Hood line was extended to Mansfield Woodhouse on 20 November 1995. We have made it clear that we are willing in principle to provide funds for stage 3, which would take train services through to Worksop. This would of course be subject to the normal criteria for funding of local transport schemes, including value for money.

Upgrade

14. **Mr. Mark Robinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to upgrade the A303 between Sparkford and Podimore. [7455]

Mr. Watts: The A303 Sparkford-Ilchester improvement scheme is included in the next batch of design, build, finance and operate projects which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 28 November 1995.

West Coast Main Line

15. **Mrs. Jane Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the condition of the west coast main line. [7456]

Mr. Watts: Railtrack has confirmed that the west coast main line is being maintained to meet the company's rigorous safety standards and contractual obligations to train operating companies.

Major Road Construction

17. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much has been spent on motorway and major trunk road construction in each of the past four years, at constant prices. [7458]

Sir George Young: Expenditure on motorway and trunk road construction at constant 1995–96 prices in each of the past four complete years has been as follows:

1991–92: £1.44 billion

1992–93: £1.40 billion

1993–94: £1.41 billion

1994–95: £1.36 billion.

18. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the progress in the design, build, finance and operate programme for trunk road development. [7459]

Sir George Young: I am delighted to announce that we signed the first DBFO project for A69 Carlisle-Newcastle on Friday 12 January. We have received robust bids on time for the second tranche and we announced a third tranche as part of the public expenditure settlement in November, bringing the total value of DBFO projects to over £1 billion.

US-UK Air Services Agreement

20. **Sir Alan Haselhurst:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next plans to meet the US Secretary for Transportation to discuss the air services agreement between the United States and the United Kingdom. [7461]

Sir George Young: I have no current plans to do so.

Private Finance Initiative

21. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what projects are under consideration in East Anglia under the private finance initiative. [7462]

Mr. Watts: We have been negotiating a contract for the improvement of the A1 between Alconbury and Peterborough as part of a design build finance and operate road project.

London Underground

22. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what major works are programmed for 1996 for London Underground. [7463]

Mr. Norris: London Underground has recently announce a comprehensive programme of investment in a number of essential infrastructure projects over the next year or so. Construction of the Jubilee line extension will continue throughout 1996.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of London Underground operating costs are met by income from fares, income from commercial sources, and subsidy or grant; and what estimate he has made of the equivalent figures for public transport in *(a)* Amsterdam, *(b)* Paris, *(c)* Berlin and *(d)* Rome. [9158]

Mr. Norris: In 1994–95 London Underground's income from fares represented 115 per cent. of its operating costs, before provision for depreciation, renewals and reorganisation costs. Income from all other sources represented 5 per cent. of operating costs. No grant or subsidy was required to meet operating costs, though total grant of £776 million was paid to London Transport to fund capital investment. I have made no estimate of the equivalent figures for the four cities listed.

24. **Mr. Robert Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to improve the A4 access to London. [7465]

Mr. Watts: There are two schemes in the national roads programme which will improve traffic flow and access on the A4. The preferred route for the junction improvements at Henley's and Waggoners corners should be announced shortly and the M4–A4 link, near Boston Manor road is in preparation for the longer term.

Improvements are also proposed for Moor roundabout and adjacent junctions in association with the proposed Prospect park development.

More modest long-term proposals are being considered at Boston Manor road junction, and for a new junction near Harlington corner.

The A4 within London is part of the red route network. This is designed to improve the movement of traffic and implementation begins in February.

Rail Privatisation

25. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes he has made to his timetable for rail privatisation. [7466]

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to the Government's response to the Transport Select Committee report on railway finances published on 14 December 1995 which was placed in the Library of the House. The response to recommendation *(a)* of the report dealt with changes to the timetable for privatisation. I recently announced that Railtrack will be sold by stock market flotation in May 1996.

26. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for transport what estimate he has made of the changes in the number of *(a)* jobs and *(b)* rail services as a result of rail privatisation; and if he will make a statement. [7467]

Mr. Watts: The Government believe that privatisation will lead to significant improvements to the railway network and services. These improvements will bring benefits not only to passengers but to the employment prospects of those who work in the railway and associated industries.

M4 Widening

27. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he now has to extend the widening of the M4 between Slough East and Reading West intersections. [7468]

Mr. Norris: Following the recent review of the programme, the proposals for the M4 and the M25 to Maidenhead are to be reviewed to establish the potential for smaller-scale improvements.

The schemes between Maidenhead and Reading are now in the longer term programme and will be taken forward only as the main programme is completed.

Road Accidents

28. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what new proposals he has to reduce the number of road accidents. [7469]

Mr. Norris: New measures planned or underway to improve road safety include the introduction of the theory part of the driving test in July and the safe town initiative.

London Transport Fares

29. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the increase in London Transport fares over *(a)* the past five years and *(b)* the last decade; and what was the general inflation rise over the same period. [7470]

Mr. Norris: The information requested is shown in the table.

Percentage increase in	*1989–90 to 1994–95*	*1984–85 to 1994–95*
London Bus fares	49	120
London Underground fares	50	122
General prices as measured by the retail prices index	24	61

Transport Projects, Greater London

30. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in what order he expects to announce firm decisions on each of the main major transport projects planned for Greater London. [7471]

Mr. Norris: This will depend upon a number of factors including the availability of public and private finance.

Road Accidents (Bicycles)

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce legislation to make it mandatory for bicycles to be fitted with a warning bell. [8567]

Mr. Norris: We have recently gone out to public consultation on proposals to update the Pedal Bicycles (Safety) Regulations with a view to incorporating into them the latest British Standard on the construction of pedal cycles. This consultation also asks for views on the compulsory fitting and use of bells on pedal cycles and we shall be considering the matter in the light of responses.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many road accidents in each of the past 10 years have involved bicycles. [8564]

Mr. Norris: The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Number of accidents (GB)*
1985	27,482
1986	26,641
1987	26,616
1988	26,161
1989	28,941
1990	26,724
1991	25,042
1992	24,962
1993	24,300
1994	25,065

Roads Programme

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which Minister in his Department was responsible for discussions over the roads programme budget with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. [9518]

Sir George Young: I am responsible for my Department's public expenditure discussions with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

Environmental Pollution

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will (1) specifically address each of the recommendations listed in the 18th report of the Royal Commission on environmental pollution, "Transport and the Environment", when he responds to that report; [9097]

(2) when he intends to respond to the 18th report of the Royal Commission on environmental pollution, "Transport and the Environment". [9096]

Mr. Norris: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to her on 6 December 1995, *Official Report*, columns *264–69*.

Public Transport, Leeds

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions he has had with representatives of West Yorkshire passenger transport authority to discuss public transport in Leeds. [7464]

Mr. Norris: I met representatives from West Yorkshire passenger transport authority in Leeds on 25 September 1995 and I expect to meet them again soon.

Trunk Road Programme

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what procedures have been put in place by his Department to monitor the environmental impacts arising from the implementation of "Managing the Trunk Road Programme". [8661]

Mr. Watts: The environmental impacts of each scheme in the national roads programme are assessed carefully and considered before a decision is taken to proceed.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if "Managing the Trunk Road Programme" has been subject to an environmental appraisal using the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" produced by the Department of the Environment; and if he will publish the appraisal; [8658]

(2) what alternative courses of action from those detailed in "Managing the Trunk Road Programme" were considered in any environmental appraisal undertaken by his Department; [8659]

(3) how "Managing the Trunk Road Programme" was modified by the results of any environmental appraisal undertaken by his Department. [8660]

Mr. Watts: The 1995 review involved a re-assessment of priorities within the roads programme rather than the adoption of a new policy. Each scheme's likely effects on the environment were taken into account during the review. A number of schemes were withdrawn because they could not achieve an acceptable environmental balance.

Birmingham New Street Station (Safety)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps the railway inspectorate of the Health and Safety Executive is taking to ensure the safety of platform gaps at Birmingham New Street station. [8959]

Mr. Watts: Railtrack and train operators are responsible for safety at this station.

The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate monitors the actions of Railtrack and the train operators to ensure that an acceptable level of safety is maintained.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recommendations he has received from the railway inspectorate in relation to platform safety at Birmingham New Street station. [8960]

Mr. Watts: None.

Heathrow to Paddington Rail Link

Mr. Khabra: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the progress of the Heathrow to Paddington express rail link. [9389]

Mr. Watts: The Heathrow express rail link, a joint venture between British Airports Authority and Railtrack, is under construction. The Heathrow express service, which will run between Heathrow and Paddington every 15 minutes, is expected to start in June 1998.

Bus and Rail Passengers

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the changes in distance travelled by passengers by bus and rail since 1979; and what assessment he has made of the figures for *(a)* the United States and *(b)* other countries in Western Europe. [9155]

Mr. Norris: Since 1979 travel in Great Britain by bus and coach has decreased by 12 per cent. while that by rail is virtually unchanged. Statistics for international companies are not available in the form requested because data are collected on a differing basis in each country.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much was spent on official hospitality by agencies associated with his Department in *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)* 1994–95; and what is projected for 1995–96. [9169]

Mr. Norris: The amount spend on official hospitality by Department of Transport agencies in 1993–94 and 1994–95 and projected spend for 1995–96 are as follows:

	1993–94 £	*1994–95* £	*1995–96* £
Highways Agency[1]	—	6,125	4,524
The Coastguard Agency[1]	—	9,013	12,000
Marine Safety Agency[1]	—	16,825	16,020
Driving Standards Agency	1,737	281	2,000

	1993–94 £	1994–95 £	1995–96 £
Transport Research Laboratory	4,255	4,026	1,850
Vehicle Certification Agency	1,443	674	1,200
Vehicle Inspectorate	0	0	0
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	9,067	11,247	14,693
Total	16,502	48,191	52,287

[1] Agencies not in existence in 1993–94.

London Transport

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the reorganisation of London Transport, announced by the chairman on 24 November 1994, was completed. [8943]

Mr. Norris: The timing of changes to LT's internal organisation is primarily a matter for its management, but I understand that the re-organisation was substantially completed by April 1995.

Fitness to Drive

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will name the members of the panel of optometrists who responded to an EU directive which has required a change in the legislation, with effect from 1 July 1996, covering medical aspects of fitness to drive. [8633]

Mr. Norris: The Department does not have information about which members of the Association of Optometrists contributed to the response.

Road Accidents (Red Routes)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the accident rate has been on red routes *(a)* for the last five years and *(b)* for the five years before the roads were designated as red routes. [9342]

Mr. Norris: The information is not available in the form requested. Implementation of the red route network began only in 1994–95. The Traffic Director for London will be monitoring its performance.

Railways Expenditure

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the gross capital spending on track and property infrastructure in each of the last 10 years, including the projection up to the end of the current financial year by Railtrack and British Rail, by region and nationally; and if he will make a statement. [8463]

Mr. Watts: The table shows the capital spending on track and property infrastructure nationally for each of the last ten years.

	£ million cash
1986–87	[1]460
1987–88	[1]539
1988–89	[1]521
1989–90	[1]661
1990–91	[1]695
1991–92	[1]862
1992–93	[1]938
1993–94	[1]825
1994–95	[2]695
1995–96	[3]780

[1] Spending on track renewals, signalling and track projects, electrification, telecoms, terminals (which includes some international spending), depots and other.
[2] Does not include any international spending.
[3] Estimated.

The information is not available on a regional basis.

National Road Programme

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the parliamentary constituency or constituencies in which each scheme in the national road programme lies; and if he will indicate changes in the status of those schemes listed in his answer to the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) of 1 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *802*. [8220]

Mr. Watts: I have put in the Library the schemes included in the national road programme as set out in "Managing the Trunk Road Programme" November 1995. The table is sorted in constituency order showing the 1995 review status and the previous 1994 review status of the included schemes. We have included under the constituency heading, some schemes which, although outside the constituency boundary, are considered as having an impact upon the adjacent areas. The table does not include those national road schemes currently under construction. I shall also place copies of this information in the Library.

Heathrow Airport (Night Flights)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will *(a)* obtain from the British Airports Authority and *(b)* publish those flights which landed at Heathrow airport between midnight and 7 am on Christmas morning 1995; and if he will make a statement. [8218]

Mr. Norris: The information from BAA plc is as follows:

Airline aircraft	Origin	Due	Actual	
Deutsche-Rettungsflugwacht Cessna 441	Berlin–Tempelhof	0010	0029	
British Airways	Delhi	0510	0441	B747
British Airways	Boston	0455	0443	B767
British Airways	Hong Kong	0445	0448	B747
British Airways	Bombay	0525	0455	B747
British Airways	Johannesburg	0525	0505	B747
British Airways	Hong Kong	0500	0509	B747
British Airways	Singapore	0535	0532	B747
British Airways	Lusaka	0555	0537	B747
British Airways	Bangkok	0540	0548	B747
Virgin Atlantic	Hong Kong	0515	0552	A340
British Airways	Jeddah	0555	0554	B767
Singapore Airlines	Singapore	0540	0557	B747
Gulf Air	Bahrain	0555	0559	B767
British Airways	Kuwait	0625	0606	B767
British Airways	Bridgetown	0655	0610	B747
Cathay Pacific	Hong Kong	0610	0612	B747
Korean Air	Anchorage	0620	0614	B747
Malaysia Airways	Kuala Lumpur	0545	0615	B747
EL AL	Tel Aviv	0630	0618	B747
Qantas	Singapore	0530	0620	B747
Qantas	Bangkok	0625	0622	B747
British Airways	Bahrain	0640	0624	B767
American Airlines	New York	0620	0625	B767

Airline aircraft	Origin	Due	Actual	
Thai Airways Int.	Bangkok	0620	0627	B747
United Airlines	Washington	0630	0632	B777
British Airways	Johannesburg	0655	0634	B747
South African Airways	Johannesburg	0630	0636	B747
Air Namibia	Frankfurt	0645	0638	B747
British Airways	Dubai	0625	0640	B777
American Airlines	Chicago	0625	0641	MD11
United Airlines	New York	0625	0643	B767
United Airlines	Newark	0650	0645	B777
Canadian Airlines Int.	Toronto	0620	0649	DC10
United Airlines	Washington	0700	0654	B777
Air Canada	Montreal	0645	0700	B767

Of these landings, all of those between midnight and 06.00 counted against the movements limit and against the noise quota except for the Cessna flight from Berlin, that aircraft being exempt from the night restrictions.

Diesel Engine Pollution

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 4 December, *Official Report*, column *59*, how many telephone calls have been received by the Vehicle Inspectorate enforcement group offices reporting smoking diesels; and what estimate he has made of the cost of making this a freephone facility. [8211]

Mr. Norris: The number of phone calls made to the smoky diesel hotline since its launch in 1991 was detailed in my answer of 30 November, *Official Report*, column *882–83*.

Based on the latest figures—11,861 calls between April and October 1995—we estimate that the direct cost of setting up the hotline as a freephone facility and running it for a year would be between £7,500 and £10,500. This excludes the cost of staff to answer and follow up calls.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has as to how many dwellings on the Trowbridge estate, Hackney will in the absence of a medical condition aggravated by physical effects qualify as seriously affected under the discretionary purchase scheme published by Union Rail in July 1995 in relation to the channel tunnel rail link. [9086]

Mr. Watts: No estimate has been made of the number of dwellings on the Trowbridge estate which might qualify under the scheme. It is for individual owner occupiers to apply if they consider they may be eligible.

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what predicted levels of settlement will qualify as seriously affecting the enjoyment of a property for the purposes of the discretionary purpose scheme for the channel tunnel rail link published in July 1995. [9075]

Mr. Watts: Under the discretionary purchase guidelines it is for Union Railways Ltd. to decide whether predicted levels of settlement seriously affect the enjoyment of an individual property, taking account also of other relevant factors that would affect enjoyment.

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will seek an amendment to paragraph 6 of the discretionary purchase scheme published in July 1995 by Union Rail to reassure property owners that predicted settlement of appropriate severity in combination with diminution of value will trigger an offer to buy from Union Rail. [9087]

Mr. Watts: Settlement and many other relevant factors can already be taken into account in considering applications for purchase under the discretionary purchase guidelines for the channel tunnel rail link.

PRIME MINISTER

Nuclear Materials (Exports)

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 11 December, *Official Report*, column *473*, if he will place in the Library a copy of the guidelines of the nuclear suppliers group. [8282]

The Prime Minister: A copy will be placed in the Library shortly.

Cyprus

Mr. Cox: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to support the application by Cyprus for membership of the European Union if there has not been a settlement on the division of Cyprus before the application is discussed. [8548]

The Prime Minister: We welcome the prospect of Cypriot membership of the EU. We want to see the whole island join, on the basis of a bizonal, bicommunal federation. The prospect of accession provides an opportunity which the United Kingdom and its EU partner's are determined to use to facilitate the search for a settlement.

Sport on Television

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Prime Minister whether the policy on sport on television contained in the letter from the Under-Secretary of State to the hon. Member for The Wrekin dated 19 December 1995 is now being reviewed by the Prime Minister. [8705]

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend made clear, the Government's position is that sporting bodies should in general be free to dispose of their broadcasting rights in the interests of their sport. I am aware of public debate on this issue; and we are keeping it under close review.

Mobile Phones

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Prime Minister how many mobile telephones were supplied to the Department of the Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Lords in each of the last eight years; and in each of those years how many different suppliers were involved. [9126]

The Prime Minister: A mobile telephone was purchased for the office of my right hon. and noble Friend in 1993, from one supplier, and two were purchased in 1994, from another.

Sport (National Body)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Prime Minister what consultations he has had, or intends to have with *(a)* the Sports Council and *(b)* governing bodies of individual

sports, concerning his proposal to establish a national academy or institute of sport; and if he intends promotion of wider participation in all sporting activity to be one of its principal objectives. [8481]

The Prime Minister: I made clear my policy on the British academy of sport in the policy statement "Sport: Raising the Game". The Sports Council is now consulting widely on what the structure and content of the academy might be. A copy of the council's consultation paper was placed in the Library of the House, and the closing date for responses is 31 January.

The British academy of sport will be the top of a sporting ladder involving schools, clubs and further and higher education institutions, and other sport's centres, and will enable all those who wish to participate in sport to do so at as high a level as their abilities allow.

Fisheries

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to raise fisheries at the intergovernmental conference; what factors led to him formulating these proposals; and if he will make a statement. [8382]

The Prime Minister: The common fisheries policy is not on the agenda of the intergovernmental conference. The IGC will be concerned with treaty change rather than the content of particular policies. We will continue to work for the improvement in the operation of the CFP in the appropriate fora.

Dr. al-Masari

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place in the Library all the written representations made by the Saudi authorities over the presence in the United Kingdom of Dr. al-Masari; and what was the response of the Government. [9174]

The Prime Minister: It is not my normal practice to do so.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions and on what dates he was asked directly or indirectly, formally or otherwise by the Saudi authorities about the presence in the United Kingdom of Dr. al-Masari; and what response he gave on each occasion. [9171]

The Prime Minister: The presence and activities of Dr. al-Masari in the United Kingdom have been raised by the Saudi authorities on a number of occasions. The Saudi's have been told that Her Majesty's Government disapprove of Dr. al-Masari's activities, and that he would be treated strictly in accordance with United Kingdom and international law.

Severe Weather (Glasgow)

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Prime Minister if he will visit those areas of Glasgow his Department estimates to be worst affected by the recent severe weather conditions. [8957]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Scotland, and his colleagues have already made a series of visits to water authority headquarters, including Glasgow, to meet the staff and hear at first hand about the handling of the problems created by record low temperatures and the thaw over the holiday period. Disruption was kept to a minimum and questions of hardship are being addressed as speedily as possible. My right hon. Friend has established a working party to report on general lessons.

Knighthoods

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister what is his policy on the recommendation for knighthoods of lords mayor of the City of London. [9685]

The Prime Minister: Such recommendations are considered in the same way as other recommendations for honours.

10 Downing Street (Functions)

Mr. Speller: To ask the Prime Minister (1) how many functions at 10 Downing street since November 1990 have been at the expense of the Conservative party; [9820]

(2) what guidelines are provided to the organisers of fund-raising events held at 10 Downing street in aid of political parties. [9821]

The Prime Minister: Ministers under this and previous Administrations have been allowed—at their own or party expense—to host non-official or party receptions or functions in Downing street. All catering, staff and other direct expenses must be met by the organisers of the event. Appropriate arrangements are required for security clearance.

Mr. John Spellar: To ask the Prime Minister (1) how many functions to raise money for political parties have been held in 10 Downing street since November 1990; [9824]

(2) how many functions to raise money for political parties were held in 10 Downing street between January 1980 and November 1990. [9819]

The Prime Minister: Under this and previous Administrations, a variety of functions have been held at No. 10 Downing street where the costs have been met by political parties. The purpose of such functions is not a matter for the Government, but I can confirm that since November 1990, there have been no functions at No. 10 Downing street at which funds have been raised for political parties, or for which tickets have been sold for the benefit of political parties.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Clergy Pensions

Mr. Cohen: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what arrangements are being made for the division of clergy pensions following divorce, and if he will make a statement. [9480]

Mr. Alison: The Pensions Act 1995 makes provision for accrued rights to prospective benefits under an occupational pension scheme to be taken into account by the court in determining a financial settlement on divorce. The settlement may include an order allocating to a former spouse part of a benefit when it becomes payable

under the scheme. These arrangements will apply to the scheme for those in the Church's ministry in the same way as to any other occupational pension scheme.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Cyprus

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Turkish Government on a framework for discussions to lead to a settlement of the division of Cyprus. [8549]

Mr. David Davis: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister discussed Cyprus with the Turkish Prime Minister, Mrs. Ciller, when she was in London on 22 November.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Greek Government on a framework for discussions to lead to a settlement of the division of Cyprus. [8550]

Mr. Davis: We discuss the Cyprus dispute regularly with the Greek Government.

Departmental Officials

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what rules of procedure relate to the declaration of private business interests in respect of officials of his Department posted overseas. [8632]

Mr. Hanley: All Foreign and Commonwealth office officials, overseas or not, who come into contact in an official capacity with a matter concerning a company, partnership or other business concern which they have an interest, must disclose that interest fully in writing.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what occasions members of his Department *(a)* addressed a meeting, *(b)* attended a meeting and *(c)* met officials from the Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies; and if he will list the Ministers and officials involved. [8647]

Mr. Hanley: This Department has had occasional contact with the Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies to discuss matters of mutual concern.

Hong Kong

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the future situation including rights to citizenship of the citizens who belong to non-Chinese ethnic groups of Hong Kong after 30 June 1997. [8556]

Mr. Hanley: Hong Kong ethnic minority British dependent territories citizens can become British nationals (overseas) before 1 July 1997. Any who do not apply to become British nationals (overseas) will automatically become British Overseas citizens. Hong Kong ethnic minority British dependent territories citizens have guaranteed right of abode in Hong Kong both before and after 1 July 1997.

International Agreements

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of his Department's publication "International Agreements: Practice and Procedures—Guidance Notes". [9037]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Yes.

Dr. al-Masari

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultation he or other Ministers of his Department have had with the Secretary of State for the Home Department and the President of the Board of Trade concerning the case of the Saudi Arabian Citizen, Mohammed al-Masari. [8699]

Mr. Hanley: Ministers have consulted on the case of Dr. al-Masari, as is normal for issues of mutual concern.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions and on what dates he was asked directly or indirectly, formally or otherwise, by the Saudi authorities about the presence in the United Kingdom of Dr. al-Masari; and what response he gave on each occasion. [9172]

Mr. Hanley: The presence and activities of Dr. al-Masari in the UK have been raised by the Saudi authorities on a number of occasions. The Saudis have been told that Her Majesty's Government disapprove of Dr. al-Masari's activities, but that he would be treated strictly in accordance with UK and international law.

Saudi Arabia (Ambassador Designate)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what *(a)* salary, *(b)* fees, *(c)* emoluments and *(d)* benefits in kind the ambassador designate to Saudi Arabia received as a non-executive director of Vickers while on secondment from the Foreign Office. [8546]

Mr. Hanley: The ambassador-designate to Saudi Arabia is an established member of Her Majesty's diplomatic service. He has therefore received no salary, fees, emoluments or benefits in kind as a non-executive director. Vickers has, however, met the travelling expenses to enable him to attend board meetings in the UK.

Human Rights

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those countries to which his Department has made representations concerning human rights abuses during the past five years. [8568]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: During the period in question, we have regularly made representations—either bilaterally or with our European partners—to a large number of other Governments concerning human rights abuses. Details of such representations over the past five years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his recent visit to Hong Kong and Beijing. [8570]

Mr. Hanley: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary visited Hong Kong and China from 6 to 11 January. In Hong Kong, he met the governor, members of the Legislative and Executive Councils, senior Hong Kong Government and British officials and business and community figures. This gave him an invaluable opportunity to hear at first hand the views and concerns of the people of Hong Kong about their future.

My right hon. and learned Friend was warmly received in Peking and held frank and constructive discussions with President Jiang Zemin, Premier Li Peng, Vice Premier Qian Qichen, and the director of the State Council of Hong Kong and Macau Affairs.

Bosnia

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from the EU administrator in Mostar in respect of relations between the Croat and Moslim population in that city and a possible EU withdrawal from the Croat-Muslim federation. [8573]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The EU administrator's diplomatic adviser briefed officials on the situation in Mostar at a meeting of the EU ad hoc working group on the former Yugoslavia on 10 January.

The EU's mandate to administer Mostar expires on 23 July 1996.

Saudi Arabia

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what communications, on what subjects, he has recently received from the British ambassador to Saudi Arabia. [8574]

Mr. Hanley: The British ambassador to Saudi Arabia reports regularly on a wide range of issues.

Environmental Pollution Report

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what dates and on what matters in connection with the 18th report of the Royal Commission on environmental pollution, "Transport and the Environment", he has made representations to the Secretary of State for Tranport. [9099]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: None.

British Troops (Torture)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which procedures are in place for acting on claims that British troops may have been subjected to psychological torture while hostages or prisoners. [9011]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: It is standard operational procedure for British troops to be debriefed after an operation. This was the case following the release of the British hostages by the Bosnian Serb army in June. The British Government will pass on any evidence of war crimes to the international criminal tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

United Nations War Crimes Tribunal

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list, giving their countries of origin and legal background, the names of the judges appointed to serve on the United Nations war crimes tribunal investigating war crimes in the former Yugoslavia. [8651]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: There are 11 judges in total. Five sit in the appeals chamber. The other six are split into two three-person teams, which preside over the two trial chambers.

Trial chamber 1 consists of:—Judge Elisabeth Odio Benito, Costa Rica, former Minister of Justice in Costa Rica from May 1990;—Judge Claude Jorda, France, former public prosecutor of the Appeals Court in Paris from 1992;—Judge Fouad Riad, Egypt, former vice-president of the Institut de Droit International from 1993.

Trial chamber 2 consists of:—Judge Gabrielle McDonald, USA, former visiting professor of law, St Mary's school of law, San Antonio, Texas from August 1991;—Judge Lal Chand Vohrah, Malaysia, former High court judge;—Judge Rustam S. Sidhwa, Pakistan, former judge of the Supreme Court from 1989 to 1992.

The appeals chamber consists of:—Judge Antonio Cassese, Italy, former president of the Council of Europe Committee for the Prevention of Torture from 1989;—judge Jules Deschenes, Canada, former chairman of the Commission of Inquiry on War Criminals in Canada from 1985–87;—Judge Adolphus G. Karibi-Whyte, Nigeria, former justice to the Supreme Court from 1984;—Judge Haopei Li, China, former arbitrator of the Permanent Court of Arbitration from 1993;—Judge Sir Ninian Stephen, Australia, Governor-General of Australia from 1982–89.

United Nations Compensation Fund

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 9 January, *Official Report*, columns *54–55*, if he will list the number of paid claims for each country and international organisation. [9532]

Mr. Hanley: The previous answer of 9 January included six countries which had submitted claims which were either transferred to another category or rejected. Paid claims by country or organisation are as follows:

Algeria: 1
Australia: 7
Bangladesh: 79
Belgium: 4
Bulgaria: 3
Canada: 11
China: 2
Egypt: 337
Ethiopia: 1
France: 47
Germany: 5
India: 189
Iran: 2
Ireland: 5

Israel: 96
Italy: 13
Jordan: 450
Kenya: 1
Korea: 1
Kuwait: 2,134
Lebanon: 21
Mauritius: 1
Morocco: 2
Pakistan: 50
Phillippines: 45
Poland: 3
Russian Federation: 1
Slovak Republic: 1
Somalia: 8
Sri Lanka: 40
Sudan: 81
Sweden: 1
Syria: 48
Thailand: 4
Tunisia: 5
Ukraine: 1
United Kingdom: 148
United States of America: 50
Yemen: 56
Federal Republic of Yugoslavia: 1
UNDP Jerusalem: 1
UNDP Kuwait: 1
UNDP Washington: 2
UNHCR Bulgaria: 1
UNHCR Canada: 1
UNHCR Geneva: 3
UNRWA Vienna: 3.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Business in the Community

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when Business in the Community was formed; how many businesses are members; what assessment he has made of its ability to represent businesses in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement about the selection of this organisation in connection with the partnerships associated with the EU peace and reconciliation funds. [7385]

Mr. Moss: Business in the Community Northern Ireland was established in 1989 and currently has 175 business members. BIC (NI) seeks to develop the involvement of businesses in the economic and social regeneration of disadvantaged urban and rural areas.

Given the emphasis on community participation under sub-programme 6—district partnerships of the EU special support programme for peace and reconciliation—it is envisaged that BIC (NI) will facilitate the nominations of business representatives to the Northern Ireland Partnership Board in consultation with the three primary organisations representative of business, namely the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and the Institute of Directors (NI).

Mobile Phones

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many mobile telephones have been supplied to his Department in each of the last eight years; and in each of those years how many different suppliers were involved. [8032]

Sir John Wheeler: The information relating to the Departments of Finance and Personnel, Economic Development, Agriculture and Education, and partial information relating to the Northern Ireland Office is as follows:

	Mobile phones supplied	*Number of suppliers*
1988–89	21	2
1989–90	5	1
1990–91	10	3
1991–92	8	2
1992—93[1]	58	5
1993–94[1]	48	3
1994–95[1]	61	4
1995–96[1]	73	4

[1] Information from Northern Ireland Office available from 1992–93 to 1995–96 only.

Annual information relating to the Departments of the Environment and Health and Social Services could be provided only at disproportionate cost; however, they have purchased a total of 259 mobile phones from three suppliers over the last eight years.

Emergency Legislation

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if Mr. John Rowe QC will be making further reports on the working of *(a)* the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) act 1978 and *(b)* the prevention of terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act. [8524]

Sir John Wheeler: It is not my intention to ask John Rowe QC to carry out a report on the operation in 1995 of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991, given that the successor legislation is undergoing its parliamentary stages. The question of a report on the operation of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 falls to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. As my right hon. and learned Friend stated in the House on 9 January 1996, *Official Report* column 33, we understand that Mr Rowe has been asked to report on the operation of that Act in 1995.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who the Government have commissioned to conduct their review of emergency legislation; what assistance that person will receive from others; what are the terms of reference; and when the reviewing body is expected to report. [8482]

Sir John Wheeler: I refer the hon. Member to the speech of my right hon. and learned Friend on Second Reading of Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill on 9 January 1996, *Official Report*, columns 31–39.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which amendments accepted by the Government in respect of the workings of the emergency provisions legislation were suggested by *(a)* Lord

Gardiner, *(b)* Sir George Baker, *(c)* Lord Colville and *(d)* Mr. John Rowe QC. [8523]

Sir John Wheeler: The following proposed amendments to the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill were recommended by *(a)* Lord Gardiner; *(b)* Sir George Baker; *(c)* Lord Colville and *(d)* John Rowe QC in their respective command papers:

Changes to schedule 1 by making offences under sections 8 and 10 of the Theft Act (Northern Ireland) 1969—robbery and aggravated burglary—capable of being certified out: Baker and Rowe.

Take provision of more flexible scheme for time limits on remand under clause 8: Rowe.

The creation of an offence of failing to stop for a search under clause 20: Rowe.

Changing the authority for searches from Chief Inspector to Inspector in clauses 20 and 23: Rowe.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what *(a)* guidelines and *(b)* other advice has been issued by his Department regarding the extension of the private finance initiative to the operation of health services. [9080]

Sir John Wheeler: The Department of Health and Social Services has issued a capital investment manual incorporating guidelines and advice on the private finance initiative in line with the national health service.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which capital projects are currently being considered under the private finance initiative; and what is the cost of each project. [9056]

Sir John Wheeler: Projects are being considered in the areas of water and sewage, transport, roads, health education and information technology. With the exception of the initial water and sewerage projects, which have an estimated value of £20–25 million, it is too early to provide an estimate of costs for other projects.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to review the system for cold weather payments. [8079]

Mr. Roger Evans: There are no plans for major changes to the scheme. However, after the end of March each year, we review the operation of the scheme over the previous winter with the Meteorological Office. In particular, we look at the links between weather stations and postcode areas and, as a result, minor adjustments are made.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many times each of the weather monitoring stations across the United Kingdom have triggered the system of cold weather payments since the last time that the map was revised. [8649]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table.

For information about Northern Ireland, I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Weather station	*Number of triggers*
Chivenor	0
Culdrose	0
Herstmonceaux	0
Manston	0
Mumbles	0
Southampton	0
St. Mawgan	0
Tiree	0
Valley	0
Aberporth	1
Aughton	1
Birmingham	1
Boscombe Down	1
Boulmer	1
Bournemouth	1
Cilfynydd	1
Coltishall	1
Dunkeswell	1
Eskmeals	1
Gatwick	1
Heathrow	1
Leeds	1
Machrihanish	1
Manchester	1
Rhoose	1
Stornoway	1
Tynemouth	1
Waddington	1
Yeovilton	1
Aberdeen	2
Bedford	2
Brize Norton	2
Capel Curig	2
Carlisle	2
Dumfries (including Whithorn)	2
Easthampstead	2
Edinburgh	2
Eskdalemuir	2
Glasgow	2
Kinloss	2
Kirkwall	2
Leeming	2
Lerwick	2
Leuchars	2
Lyneham	2
Marham	2
Shawbury	2
Stanstead	2
Tulloch Bridge	2
Wattisham	2
Whitby	2
Wick	2
Wilsden	2
Aviemore	3
Braemar	3

1. The network of 55 weather stations was updated for the start of the 1995–96 scheme, effective from 1 November 1995.
2. The information relates to Great Britain only.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received respecting the system for cold weather payments during the most recent period of inclement weather; and if he will make a statement. [9269]

Mr. Evans: Since 21 December, my right hon. Friend has been asked nine parliamentary questions and received 22 pieces of correspondence about this matter.

Setting-up Home Grant

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to include a setting-up home grant financed through the social fund for the benefit of homeless people. [8261]

Mr. Roger Evans: The Government have no plans to change the broad principles of the discretionary social fund, which we believe uses available resources effectively to help large numbers of people who are most in need. Community care grants and interest-free loans from the social fund are made to many people establishing themselves in a permanent home in the community. In April 1995, we introduced additional guidance advising social fund officers to give particular consideration to helping vulnerable or recently homeless people moving to permanent accommodation to remain in the community if there was a danger that they might otherwise go into care.

We believe it would be a backward step to reintroduce a system of mandatory grants akin to the previous single payment scheme, which was open to abuse and spiralling expenditure.

Institutional Discrimination

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to be able to reply to the question from the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow of 22 November relating to institutional discrimination listed by his Department between men and women for social security benefit purposes. [9178]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 11 January, *Official Report*, column *326*.

Funeral Payments

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to increase the limit which currently applies to the funeral payment from the social fund towards funeral director's fees. [8584]

Mr. Roger Evans: Like other social fund payments, funeral payments are not subject to the annual uprating of income-related benefits. However, we keep the level of all social fund payments, including the ceiling placed on the amount allowable for funeral directors' fees, under review.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what assessment he has made of the average cost for the services of funeral directors when calculating the limit which applies to funeral payments from the social fund; [8588]

(2) what criteria underlay the calculation of the £500 limit on the funeral payment from the social fund payable towards funeral directors' fees. [8582]

Mr. Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) to the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) on 9 January 1995, *Official Report*, columns *160–61*.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes have been made to the limit on the amount payable from the social fund for funeral payments toward funeral directors' fees in the last 10 years. [8583]

Mr. Evans: From 1980 to 1987, supplementary benefit single payments regulations provided for payment of an unlimited amount sufficient to meet the reasonable cost of any specified essential expenses for the funeral director's fees which fell to be met by the responsible person. This provision was carried forward to the social fund in 1987 and remained unchanged until 5 June 1995, when a ceiling of £500 on the amount allowable for specified funeral directors' fees for a dignified social fund funeral was introduced.

Divorce

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the net cost to the public purse of *(a)* earmarking and *(b)* pension-splitting, in the event of divorce; and what are the main component parts of the costs. [9481]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is in the table.

There would also be extra administration costs for public service schemes. If the state earnings-related pension scheme was spilt, this would result in additional costs.

My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, will reply in writing in respect of the legal aid and court costs of both earmarking and pension splitting in the year 2020 as the information is not immediately available.

£ million

	Earmarking		*Pension-splitting*	
	1997	*2020*	*1997*	*2020*
Costs to unfunded public service schemes	0	0	500	less than 50
Loss in tax revenue and increased tax relief	0	0	negligible	80
Income related benefits	negligible	–50	negligible	–70
Legal Aid and court costs	up to 130	n/a	up to 120	n/a

1. Costs to unfunded public service schemes are rounded to the nearest £100 million in 1997.
2. All other costs are rounded to ther nearest £10 million.
3. A minus sign denotes a saving to the Exchequer.
4. Estimates are for full year costs, at constant prices.

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidance he intends to issue to *(a)* Departments, *(b)* executive agencies, *(c)* non-departmental public bodies and *(d)* outside bodies and arm's-length organisations which he has responsibility for, or an interest in, regarding the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if he will make a statement. [9227]

Mr. Burt: A brief guide to the Disability Discrimination Act was issued in November 1995 and further information material on the provisions of the Act will follow. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment is currently consulting on a draft code of practice relating to the employment provisions in the Act and statutory guidance related to the definition of disability. Consultation on proposals for regulations under the education, employment and definition provisions of the Act is also currently under way. I will be asking the National Disability Council, when it first meets, to produce and consult on a code of practice relating to the rights of access to goods and services. At the same time, we shall consult on associated regulations. All these items will be published in plenty of time to allow employers and service providers to prepare themselves for the introduction of the new rights and duties. We will ensure that this Department and any bodies for which it is responsible will be made aware of their responsibilities under the Act.

DEFENCE

Former Yugoslavia (Vessels)

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the names and tonnage of all British-registered ships hired for NATO/UN operations in the former Yugoslavia and the names and tonnage of all non-British vessels with their country of registration; and if he will make a statement. [7767]

Mr. Soames: The names, tonnages and country of registration of (dry cargo) vessels chartered, are as follows. Details are given by financial year.

Non-British vessels chartered for NATO/UN operations in former Yugoslavia

Name	*Tonnage (dwt)*	*Flag*
FY 1992–93		
Bassro Star	5,586	Norwegian
Belvaux	5,064	Luxembourg
Maersk Kent	12,788	Bahamas
Maria J	6,028	German
Via Tirreno	7,324	Italian
Mercandian Duke	7,200	Danish
Nornews Service	3,930	Norwegian
Rheiderland	3,936	German
Rosa Dan	14,000	Danish
Santa Maria	3,670	German
Sea Bird	4,270	Danish
Sophie	3,217	Danish
FY 1993–94		
Mercandian Duke	7,200	Danish
Belvaux	5,064	Luxembourg
Nornews Service	3,930	Norwegian
Arroyofrio Dos	5,[illegible]	Spanish
Alster Rapid	2,515	German

Non-British vessels chartered for NATO/UN operations in former Yugoslavia

Name	*Tonnage (dwt)*	*Flag*
FY 1994–95		
Alster Rapid	2,515	German
Bassro Star	5,586	Spanish
Mercandian Prince II	7,200	Danish
FY 1995–96 (up to 3 January 1996)		
Neptune Olympic (Twice)	7,200	Greek
Mercandian Senator	7,200	Danish
Yuriy Maksaryov (Twice)	17,773	Ukranian

None of these vessels is British registered. We charter on the international market through the Baltic exchange and all ship owners have equal opportunity to compete in open competition for MOD business.

In addition to these vessels chartered, the United States Military Sealift Command loaned two vessels free of charge and a further two vessels on repayment, during the current financial year. We were also able to use a UN chartered and funded vessel at no cost to the MOD.

Overseas Training Assistance

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those countries in which British military personnel have provided training assistance during the past five years. [8571]

Mr. Soames: Available records show that UK military personnel provided training assistance in the following countries between 1 January 1991 and 31 December 1995:

Albania
Angola
Antigua and Barbuda[1]
Australia
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Barbados[1]
Belize
Bermuda
Botswana
British Virgin Islands
Brunei
Bulgaria
Cayman Islands
Chile
Colombia
Dominica[1]
Ecuador
Egypt
Estonia[2]
Fiji
Gambia
Ghana
Grenada[1]
Hong Kong
Indonesia
Jamaica

Japan
Jordan
Kenya
Kuwait
Latvia[2]
Lesotho
Lithuania[2]
Malawi
Malaysia
Maldives
Mauritius
Mexico
Mozambique
Namibia
Nigeria
Oman
Peru
Poland
Portugal
Qatar
Romania
Rwanda
Saudi Arabia
Singapore
South Africa
Sri Lanka
St. Kitts Nevis[1]
St. Lucia[1]
St. Vincent[1]
Swaziland
Thailand
Turks and Caicos Islands
Uganda
United Arab Emirates
Zambia
Zimbabwe.

[1] Trained by a team based in Barbados.
[2] Collective training in Latvia.

This list covers those countries to which short-term training teams have been sent, as well as those countries in which we have resident loan service personnel or longer term British military advisory and training teams. A short-term training team also deployed to Puerto Rico to assist US forces in training the combined Caribbean community and common market contingent—comprising detachments from Jamaica, Antigua, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago—and also contingents from Bangladesh and Guatemala to prepare them for operations with the multinational force in Haiti. In addition, forces on exercise overseas often provide limited training to, or train alongside, the armed forces of the host nation. A central record of such training is not, however, maintained.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those countries whose military forces have been provided with training facilities in the United Kingdom during the past five years. [8572]

Mr. Soames: Available records show that military personnel from the following countries were given training in the UK between 1 January 1991 and 31 December 1995:

Albania
Algeria
Anguilla
Antigua and Barbuda
Argentina
Australia
Austria
Bahamas
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Barbados
Belarus
Belgium
Belize
Bermuda
Botswana
Brazil
Brunei
Bulgaria
Cameroon
Canada
Cayman Islands
Chad
Chile
Czech Republic
Denmark
Dominica
Ecuador
Egypt
El Salvador
Estonia
Falkland Islands
Fiji
Finland
France
Gambia
Germany
Ghana
Greece
Grenada
Guatemala
Guyana
Honduras
Hong Kong
Hungary
India
Indonesia
Republic of Ireland
Israel
Italy
Jamaica
Japan
Jordan
Kazakhstan

Kenya
Republic of Korea
Kuwait
Kyrgyzstan
Latvia
Lebanon
Lithuania
Macedonia
Malawi
Malaysia
Maldives
Malta
Mauritius
Mexico
Moldova
Montserrat
Morocco
Mozambique
Namibia
Nepal
Netherlands
New Zealand
Nigeria
Norway
Oman
Pakistan
Paraguay
Philippines
Poland
Peru
Portugal
Qatar
Romania
Saudi Arabia
Senegal
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
Singapore
Slovakia
Slovenia
South Africa
Spain
Sri Lanka
St. Kitts Nevis
St. Lucia
St. Vincent
Sudan
Swaziland
Sweden
Switzerland
Tanzania
Thailand
Trinidad and Tobago
Turkey
USA
UAE
Uganda
Ukraine
Venezuela
Yemen
Zaire
Zambia
Zimbabwe.

Meat Purchases

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much meat was purchased by his Department in each of the last five years; how much of this was British meat in 1995; and if he will list the other countries from which he purchases meat, together with the quantity of meat. [8987]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Since 1 October 1994, when the Ministry of Defence food supply contract commenced, NAAFI has purchased meat for my Department. Before that date the Ministry purchased meat direct. The value of meat purchased for the last five financial years is as follows:

£ million

Financial year	*Purchased by MOD*	*Purchased by NAAFI*
1990–91	34.290	—
1991–92	30.122	—
1992–93	30.581	—
1993–94	30.376	—
1994–95	[1]15.664	[2]13.877

[1] April to September 1994.
[2] October to March 1995.

During calendar year 1995 my Department bought £8.6 million British meat from NAAFI and £19.861 million overseas meat from NAAFI. NAAFI procures meat from wholesalers and importers on the open market to obtain the best possible price. The source of each cut of meat therefore varies from month to month, however, all pork, boned and rolled sirloin, beef diced, beef mince and ox liver have always been United Kingdom sourced. NAAFI does not have detailed records of how much meat has been procured from each overseas source, but the countries most commonly used are: Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Denmark, Holland, Australia, New Zealand, Eire, France and Chile.

This information applies to beef, pork, lamb, poultry, gammon, offal, veal, rabbit, goat, and bacon but not to manufactured products such as sausages, pasties or burgers.

Gulf War (Low Flying)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the use of low-level attacks by British aircraft during the Gulf war; what changes to low-level flying operations were made during the war; and if he will state the reasons for these changes. [8991]

Mr. Soames: In the initial stages of the air campaign Tornado GR1s carried out low-level attacks against Iraqi airfields. These were established RAF tactics designed to allow attacking aircraft to delay detection by hostile radars and to minimise the effectiveness of air and ground defences, particularly when on missions against heavily defended targets. Moreover, the JP233 airfield denial

weapon, an important element of plans to disrupt Iraqi air operations, was designed to be delivered at low level. It was always the intention that attacks would in due course be switched to medium level and this decision was taken by the operational commanders on day four of the campaign once it became clear that the task of grounding the Iraqi air force had been achieved and that, with the substantial degradation of the Iraqi air defence system, the threat to operations at medium level was much reduced.

The lessons of the Gulf war have been extensively evaluated. The principal lessons were set out in the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1992" and further evidence was provided to the Defence Select Committee in connection with its report on the implementation of the lessons learned from Operation Granby. In respect of low flying, the conflict demonstrated the need to provide a more flexible capability for the full spectrum of operational environments. The need for low-level flying nevertheless remains. In many scenarios it is critical to the success of operations and the special skills required cannot be acquired at short notice.

Army Ambulances

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to ensure that new ambulances for the Army are locally sourced. [9455]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire (Sir A. Grant) on 9 January, *Official Report*, column *3*.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how frequently Army ambulances are replaced. [9457]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The last major procurement of Army ambulances was made between 1980 and 1983.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many ambulances are currently operated by the Army; and when the ambulance fleet is due for replacement. [9458]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Army currently operates 858 ambulances which are due for replacement over the next four years.

Chemical and Biological Warfare

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what collaboration has occurred in the field of chemical and biological warfare as a result of the mutual defence assistance programme between Britain and the United States of America. [7306]

Mr. Arbuthnot: No reference has been found in the records available to such a programme.

Defence Evaluation and Research Agency

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will consider instructing the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency to hold records centrally on the annual amount it spends on overseas travel; and if he will make a statement. [8433]

Mr. Arbuthnot: No. The delegation of authority for expenditure on overseas travel to managers within the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency's business sectors conforms fully with my Department's financial management procedures and I see no reason to interfere with the chief executive's arrangements for managing the agency.

RAF Training Group Defence Agency

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will consider instructing the Royal Air Force Training Group Defence Agency to hold records centrally on the annual amount it spends on overseas travel; and if he will make a statement. [8432]

Mr. Arbuthnot: No. The delegation of authority for expenditure on overseas travel to managers within the Royal Air Force Training Group Defence Agency conforms fully with my Department's financial management procedures and I see no reason to interfere with the chief executive's arrangements for managing the agency.

Dr. al-Masari

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions and on what dates he was asked directly or indirectly, formally or otherwise, by the Saudi authorities about the presence in the United Kingdom of Dr. al-Masari; and what response he gave on each occasion. [9173]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The presence and activities of Dr. al-Masari in the UK have been raised by the Saudi authorities on a number of occasions. The Saudis have been told that Her Majesty's Government disapprove of Dr. al-Masari's activities, and that he would be treated strictly in accordance with UK and international law.

Torture

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what advice and training is provided to British troops to withstand the effects of psychological torture. [9010]

Mr. Soames: Conduct after capture training is made available to those personnel most vulnerable to capture in time of war or other crisis.

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on allegations of torture made by British service personnel while hostages of Serbian forces. [8650]

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what reports he has received of the allegations of psychological torture of British troops taken hostage in Bosnia; and what assessment he has made of their accuracy. [9009]

Mr. Soames: There is no evidence that the British service personnel who were taken hostage by the Bosnian Serbs in May 1995 were physically tortured or subjected to a campaign of psychological abuse. While the conditions in which they were held were far from ideal, they were generally treated satisfactorily. However, in an isolated incident, one British soldier had a threat made against his life by his captors. This was totally unacceptable conduct by the Bosnian Serbs and we

strongly condemn it. All UK hostages were debriefed on their release and reports have been forwarded to the UN war crimes tribunal which is investigating the detention of UN personnel.

Land Mines, Bosnia

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many service personnel are involved in the implementation force de-mining effort in Bosnia; and what form of training they have received; [9003]

(2) if he will make a statement about the progress of the IFOR de-mining effort in Bosnia; and if it is running to schedule; [8986]

(3) what assessment he has made of the problems posed by land mines placed in Bosnia; and if he will make a statement. [9001]

Mr. Soames: The UK's contribution to IFOR includes 42 service personnel who are specially trained in explosive ordnance disposal. Their role is, however, limited to monitoring and co-ordinating the programme for the clearance of mines and related deices, except where there is a serious threat to life or where clearance is necessary to allow IFOR to complete assigned tasks. Otherwise, under the terms of the peace agreement, clearance is the responsibility of the consenting parties themselves. They are required to complete clearance within the zones of separation by 19 January. The work is in progress, although efforts are being hampered by poor weather and incomplete minefield records.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many service personnel have been injured as *(a)* a direct and *(b)* an indirect consequence of land mines placed in Bosnian territory; [8984]

(2) how many service personnel have been injured as part of the IFOR de-mining effort in Bosnia. [9005]

Mr. Soames: Information is not available in the format requested. However, since operations began in the former Yugoslavia, three British service personnel have been killed and eight seriously injured in mine explosions, none of these during IFOR's operations.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the cost of the IFOR de-mining effort in Bosnia. [9004]

Mr. Soames: It is not possible to identify separately the estimated cost of IFOR's monitoring and co-ordinating of the mine clearance programme which is itself the responsibility of the parties to the peace agreement.

Ministerial Visit (Philippines)

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the names and designations of the civilian and military officials he met during his recent visit to the Philippines; and if he will make a statement on the defence agreement made with that country. [8569]

Mr. Portillo: During my visit to the Philippines which was hosted by the Secretary for National Defence, Mr. de Villa, I had a meeting with President Ramos and met, during official calls at the Department for National Defence and military establishments, the Under Secretary, General Gacis, the Chief of Staff, General Enrile, the commanding generals of the army and air force, Lieutenant General Soriano and Lieutenant General Acedera, and acting Flag Officer in Command of the Philippine navy, Commodore Santos, together with members of their staffs and other senior officers. I also met Mr. Gordon, the chairman and administrator of the Subic Bay metropolitan authority and members of his staff.

I was pleased to sign a defence co-operation memorandum of understanding with Secretary de Villa which will strengthen our defence relations through, for example, exchange visits and joint military exercises.

De-mining Equipment

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the de-mining equipment possessed by his Department. [8988]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The primary requirement of the armed forces is to clear a path through minefield obstacles rather than to clear whole minefields. The following types of equipment are held by the United Kingdom armed forces to meet this requirement:

- Mineploughs
- Scatterable Mine Clearance Device
- Giant Viper (explosive hose)
- MIMIC (countermeasure for magnetic influence mines)
- Hand held mine detectors
- Prodders and hand held tools
- Mine and route markers
- Wheelbarrow (remote control vehicle).

Where mines have been located and marked for subsequent clearance, disposal is usually carried out using a standard demolition charge. In certain circumstances, small arms fire is used.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which de-mining projects his Department funds world wide. [9006]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Government support for de-mining programmes throughout the world is provided through the Overseas Development Administration. In this context, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) to the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) on 29 November 1995, *Official Report*, column 742.

Turnstile House

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement about his Department's plans to demolish Turnstile house, London; and when this proposal was agreed; [9007]

(2) how much was spent by his Department on the refurbishment of Turnstile house, London; and when this refurbishment was conducted. [9008]

Mr. Arbuthnot: My Department has no plans to demolish Turnstile house. The building was vacated in September 1994 and shortly afterwards it was returned to the commercial landlord.

No money was spent by my Department on Turnstile house beyond that for routine maintenance and decoration. In the more recent years before the building was vacated, my Department paid the following amounts under the terms of its occupancy agreement.

	£ thousand 1992–93	£ thousand 1993–94	£ thousand 1994–95
Annual maintenance contribution	390	403	224
Minor works repairs and decorations	150	133	35

Nuclear Deterrent

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy in respect of the targeting of the United Kingdom's nuclear deterrent at any particular country; and when this policy was first published. [9161]

Mr. Soames: In line with the joint announcement made at the Prime Minister's meeting with President Yeltsin on 15 February 1994, all United Kingdom nuclear missiles are detargeted.

Trident Submarines (Refitting)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is his Department's estimate of the cost of refitting Trident submarines at Devonport under *(a)* a privatised company and *(b)* the current management team; [8982]

(2) when he will sign the contract with Devonport Management Ltd for the refitting of Trident submarines. [8983]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Negotiations for the design and build of the facilities for refitting Vanguard class and ultimately all nuclear powered submarines at Devonport are proceeding. A decision on contract award is expected in the first part of this year. Parallel negotiations on the sale of both royal dockyards continue. The objective is to put in place the most financially beneficial long term arrangements for all Royal Navy ship refitting work. It would not be appropriate to speculate about details while negotiations are under way.

Type 23 Frigates

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many cracks have been discovered in the hulls of his Department's type 23 frigates; when these cracks were discovered; on what ships they have been discovered; when his Department was warned that cracks could appear; what actions were taken by his Department following this advice; how much it will cost to repair the damage; and if he will make a statement. [8990]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Cracking in an intricate steel structure such as a warship, subjected to randomly varying sealoads, is not unusual. The cracking itself is not usually a matter for immediate concern, but any occurrence is assessed and kept under review until the next convenient opportunity for repairs.

During the construction of HMS Norfolk, the first type 23 frigate, the need for stiffening in part of the deck structure was identified using previously untried techniques. The construction of Norfolk was too far advanced for the full design change to be incorporated at that time but it was done during her first programmed docking period in 1993. All subsequent ships of the class were built with this modification included. The total estimated cost of incorporating this modification into the whole class is about £1 million.

Minor steelwork cracking has occurred in some subsequent type 23 frigates, but this has not been assessed as requiring special action. Repairs have been carried out as part of the normal ship upkeep measures and the costs have not been separately identified.

At no time has the safety of any of the type 23 frigates or their crews been at risk.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what legal costs arising from the Scott inquiry have been incurred by his Department on behalf of Ministers and ex-Ministers; and if he will name the individuals concerned; [8755]

(2) what legal costs arising from the Scott inquiry have been incurred by the Department on behalf of current and past *(a)* civil servants and *(b)* advisers and secondees. [8746]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The value of legal services charged by the Treasury Solicitor's Department together with accounts settled to date from public funds for the provision of external legal services, incurred on behalf of Ministers, ex-Ministers, civil servants and former civil servants of my Department in connection with the Scott inquiry is £215,862. No legal costs have been incurred on behalf of other advisors or secondees. The cost of any advice in connection with the Scott inquiry given by Government lawyers as part of their normal duties cannot be quantified. It is not the Government's policy to identify the individuals who have received legal advice, either directly or indirectly.

Japanese Forces (Training)

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment of British interests underlay his invitation to members of the Japanese armed forces to train in the United Kingdom; how many personnel will be involved; at what cost to British public funds; what representations he has received in respect of this matter; what have been the nature of such representations; and if he will make a statement. [8575]

Mr. Portillo: I issued no such invitation. However, I expect that small numbers of Japanese officers will continue to receive training in Britain as they have since 1977. My Department has received a small number of representations from members of the public, expressing general concern about defence relations with Japan.

F16 Aircraft

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he has given to the proposal

to lease American F16 aircraft; and when he expects to announce his decision to the House. [8989]

Mr. Arbuthnot: My Department is currently evaluating a proposal to upgrade the Tornado F3's weapons systems. As a routine part of our evaluation process, we are examining the comparative costs of alternative options, including acquiring F16 aircraft from the United States. We expect to take a decision on whether or not to proceed with the Tornado F3 upgrade by the end of the current financial year. Any procurement decisions will be announced to the House in the usual way.

Export Licence Applications

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what matters are routinely addressed in the course of considering applications for defence export licences. [9272]

Mr. Arbuthnot: In assessing export licence applications, consideration is given to our national security, our policy towards the recipient country and our international obligations including the established criteria and guidelines agreed by the permanent five members of the UN Security Council; with the European Union member states and in the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Supplies (Local Sourcing)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to ensure that supplies for the British armed forces are, so far as is possible under EU regulations, locally sourced and create local employment. [9482]

Mr. Arbuthnot: We aim wherever possible and in accordance with our obligations under EU regulations to purchase all major equipment and services for the British armed forces by competitive tender to secure best value for money for the taxpayer. As a result, over 90 per cent. of our business is awarded to United Kingdom industry. In addition, low-value purchases by MOD units and establishments of minor equipment and services, which are not generally subject to the EU regulations, also make an important contribution to local employment and economies. In 1994–95, expenditure on such local purchases totalled approximately £200 million.

Gulf War

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions during the Gulf war there was an assessed threat of possible chemical agent attack which necessitated orders being given to service personnel to take nerve agent pre-treatment set tablets. [9604]

Mr. Soames: During the conduct of Operation Granby, which ran from 9 August 1990 to 11 April 1991, the assessed threat of chemical weapon attack in the theatre of operations was regarded as sufficiently high to necessitate the issuing of orders for nerve agent pre-treatment—NAPS—tablets to be taken during the period from 18 January 1991, following the start of the air war, to 1 March 1991, when hostilities ceased. The orders applied to all units and personnel in, or deploying into, theatre.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action heads of his Department's executive agencies are taking to safeguard the provision of pre-retirement courses in the event of such agencies seeking to make economies; and if he will make a statement. [9146]

Mr. Arbuthnot: These matters are the responsibility of the chief executives of the Defence Agencies. I have asked the chief executives of the agencies to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from G. H. Wilson to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 15 January 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence concerning the safeguarding of the provision of pre-retirement courses as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of this Agency.

We are not seeking to make economies in this area and I am taking positive action to safeguard any entitlement to pre-retirement courses which Service personnel of this Agency have.

Letter from P. Niedzwiedzki to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 15 January 1996:

REFERENCE:

A. PQ REFERENCE: 9883G

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the provision of pre-retirement courses as this area falls within the area of responsibility of the Chief Executive of Service Children's Schools (North West Europe) Agency.

SCS(NWE) staff are eligible to apply for places on MOD pre-retirement courses. Course places are arranged and approved by CM(Welfare) and the courses themselves are usually held in the UK. Participant's travel and subsistence expenses are met by the Agency. There is a regular uptake of such courses by SCS(NWE) staff.

The Agency's Framework Document confirms that welfare services are one of a range of central services provided by the MOD to the Agency. SCS(NWE) expects the current level of welfare support, including pre-retirement sources, to be continued without diminution.

Letter from Colonel A. H. Roach to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 15 January 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about what action heads of his Department's executive agencies are taking to safeguard the provision of pre-retirement courses in the event of such agencies seeking to make economies as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Animal Centre (DAC).

The DAC has no intention, either now or in the future, of seeking to economise on the provision of pre-retirement courses to eligible military or civilian personnel.

Letter from Paul Altobell to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 15 January 1996:

PARLIAMENTARY ENQUIRY NUMBER 9883G

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about pre-retirement courses as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Analytical Services Agency (DASA).

DASA has no plans to take special action in respect of pre-retirement courses. It is our custom to follow the lead of our parent department, the Ministry of Defence, in these matters.

Letter from Brigadier A. W. Pollard to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 15 January 1996:

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION (PQ9883G—THE PROVISION OF PRE-RETIREMENT COURSES TO AGENCY PERSONNEL

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about what action I am taking to safeguard the provision of pre-retirement courses, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Logistic Information Systems Agency (LISA).

All of my military staff who reach the end of their careers while serving at LISA are entitled to the normal resettlement facilities offered by the Services. My civilian staff have the same access as that enjoyed by other Civil Servants to a comprehensive programme of pre-retirement courses.

I am keen to preserve the entitlement in both cases and, in my Agency, they would be unlikely targets for saving measures.

Letter from J. R. Prince to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 15 January 1996:

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION—ARMY TECHNICAL SUPPORT AGENCY

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about safeguarding the provision of pre-retirement courses in the event of Agencies seeking to make economies as this matter falls in my area of responsibility.

The number of staff reaching retirement age in the Army Technical Support Agency in any one year is small, as are the costs associated with pre-retirement training courses. I regard pre-retirement training as an important part of preparing loyal Agency staff for retirement and, as such, would not expect to include such training in any economy exercise.

Letter from R. H. Embleton to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 15 January 1996:

In the absence on duty of the Chief Executive, I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about safeguarding the provision of pre-retirement courses.

I regard the provision of pre-retirement courses as important. All military and civilian staff of the Defence Postal and Courier Services Agency are encouraged to attend such courses as they may be eligible, and entitled to under MOD regulations. I have no plans to change this situation.

Letter from Rear Admiral J. H. S. McAnally to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 15 January 1996:

The Secretary of State for Defence has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question, about safeguarding the provision of pre-retirement courses in the event of agency economies, in my capacity as Chief Executive of the Naval Recruiting and Training Agency (NRTA).

All but the most senior (CDS) Naval personnel leave the Royal Navy before the national retirement age. In order to assist them in preparing for, and identifying a suitable second career in civilian life, they are eligible to undertake a variety of pre-release resettlement (pre-retirement) training.

The provision of resettlement training is the responsibility of the tri-Service Resettlement Organisation (TSRO) which does not form part of the NRTA. However, as Chief Executive of the NRTA, I am publicly committed in the Agency Corporate Plan "to meet the Personnel Functional Standards in respect of Service Personnel and, where appropriate, adopt similar principles for civilian employees." Personnel Functional Standards are a set of mandatory and common standards that are applied to all RN personnel wherever they are serving. The Standards may not be amended without the approval of the Navy Board. An appropriate Personnel Functional standard exists for the provision of resettlement training.

In view of the foregoing, if it should be necessary to seek economies from within the agency, the provision of resettlement courses should not be affected.

Letter from Air Vice-Marshal R. H. Kyle to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 15 January 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about safeguarding the provision of pre-retirement courses in the event of Defence Agencies seeking to make economies because this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Royal Air Force Maintenance Group Defence Agency (RAF MGDA).

All retiring MOD Civil Servants employed within the RAF MGDA have the opportunity to attend a pre-retirement course; this would normally take place within their last 12 months of service. I recognise this as a most valuable contribution to preparing staff for retirement and it is not a provision which would suffer as a result of any economy measure within the RAF MGDA. To reinforce this I shall be including an appropriate commitment in the RAF MGDA Civilian Training Plan.

Letter from Keith Ellender to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 15 January 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the provision of pre-retirement courses as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Disposal Sales Agency.

The provision of pre-retirement courses for staff in my Agency comes from central Ministry of Defence funds, in the same way that it used to before agency status was achieved.

Letter from Brian Raine to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 15 January 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about safeguarding the provision of pre-retirement courses as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of Queen Victoria School.

I attach considerable importance to pre-retirement courses and staff are invited to apply for such courses conducted by either the Civil Service Council for Further Education or Local Education Authorities. This Agency has not sought, and currently has no plans to seek, economies in this area.

If you have any further questions about this do not hesitate to contact me.

Letter from D. A. Thomas to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 15 January 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about pre-retirement courses on behalf of the Chief Executive of the Defence Accounts Agency as this matters falls within his area of responsibility.

The Defence Accounts Agency will continue to ensure that all eligible staff have the opportunity to attend pre-retirement courses. Currently, provision within the Agency is normally by the MOD Welfare Service, but, if necessary, courses are also arranged locally on site or externally. Irrespective of any future proposed economy measures, it is not intended that these arrangements should be altered.

Letter from Captain W. S. Graham to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 15 January 1996:

1. I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence on what action is taken within the 'Naval Aircraft Repair Organisation (NARO)' to safeguard the provision of pre-retirement courses as the matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the NARO.

2. Personnel have the opportunity to attend pre-retirement courses in Portsmouth Naval Base. There are 4 per year.

3. In the event that they were stopped, we would organise our own, either by using in-house training facilities or contractors.

Letter from P. A. James to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 15 January 1996:

I am replying, on behalf of the Chief Executive of Military Survey Defence Agency (who is on duty in Germany) to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the provision

of pre-retirement courses in Executive Agencies, as this matter falls within the Chief Executive's area of responsibility and I am his deputy.

Military Survey supports the continued use of pre-retirement courses run by the Ministry of Defence.

Military Survey has always encouraged personnel to attend pre-retirement courses. We have no plans to change this policy.

Letter from Brigadier M. G. R. Hodson to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 15 January 1996:

I am replying to your Question (PQ9883G) to the Secretary of State for Defence, about safeguarding the provision of pre-retirement courses, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Transport and Movements Executive Agency (DTMX).

For civil servants, pre-retirement courses are carried out centrally and continue to be available to Agency staff. Courses are normally offered 6 months before retirement and there are no plans to restrict their availability.

For Service personnel, resettlement courses, which are comprehensive and available to all military in their last two years of service, and are designed to provide training for a second career, continue to be provided. There are no plans to limit eligibility.

I trust that this answers your concerns. Please be assured that I will always act in the best interests of my staff, both civilian and military.

Letter from Brigadier M. J. Roycroft to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 15 January 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the provision of pre-retirement courses.

As the Chief Executive of the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency (DCTA), I can confirm that my Agency will continue to offer all eligible staff the opportunity of attending pre-retirement courses. I do not foresee a situation arising which would cause me to change this policy.

If I can be of further help to you, please let me know.

Letter from J. C. R. Hunt to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 15 January 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about pre-retirement courses as, for the staff of the Meterological Office, this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive.

The Meterological Office offers a pre-retirement course to all staff. I have no intention of changing this practice.

Letter from Air Commodore P. C. Ayee to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 15 January 1996:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about what actions heads of executive agencies were taking to safeguard pre-retirement courses, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Royal Air Force Signals Engineering Establishment Defence Agency.

The cost of pre-retirement courses do not fall to the Agency. Pre-retirement courses for civil servants are funded directly from MOD central funds, and resettlement courses for service personnel are funded by the RAF Personnel and Training Command. Thus, any Agency economies would not affect the provision of such courses.

Letter from M. R. Pack to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 15 January 1996:

Your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about pre-retirement courses for staff in his agencies has been referred to the Chief Executive of the Hydrographic Office. Unfortunately Admiral Essenhigh is at present absent from the Office on official duty so I am replying to you on his behalf.

It is the policy of the Hydrographic Office Defence Agency to offer pre-retirement courses to all employees who are approaching retirement. These pre-retirement courses are conducted by the Somerset College of Arts and Technology which is based in Taunton. There is no intention that this policy should be changed in any way.

It is recognised by the senior management of the Hydrographic Office that these courses provide a very valuable service in assisting staff to cope better with the transition to the different lifestyle which retirement brings.

I hope this information has been of assistance.

Letter from Air Commodore A. A. Nicholson to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 15 January 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about safeguarding the provision of pre-retirement courses in executive agencies, insofar as this bears on my own responsibilities for the Training Group Defence Agency.

I can confirm that this Agency is not seeking to make economies by reducing the provision of pre-retirement courses; and that I maintain a close interest in any proposed changes beyond the Agency's boundaries, which might affect my personnel in this respect.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Agency's owner, the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief Personnel & Training Command.

Letter from Brigadier K. J. W. Goad to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 15 January 1996:

As Chief Executive of the Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency (ABSDA), I reply to your question, to the Secretary of State for Defence, about pre-retirement courses within Defence Agencies.

Pre-retirement courses for both military and civilian ABSDA staff are funded centrally by the MoD. Within the Agency, staff are actively encouraged to make full use of redundancy counselling, outplacement services and pre-retirement courses. I can state, categorically, that ABSDA is not seeking to make economies in this area.

I trust that I have fully answered your enquiry; if not, please come back to me.

Letter from Brigadier J. R. Drew to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 15 January 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about pre-retirement courses, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Army Base Repair Organisation (ABRO).

There have been no changes in the policy on pre-retirement courses since ABRO was established as a Defence Agency in April 1993. In accordance with central Ministry of Defence (MOD) policy, all staff have the opportunity to attend one pre-retirement course, which should take place during the last 12 months of service, to ensure that the information given, particularly on pensions and financial matters, is current. Where possible the arrangements are tailored to suit the individual. MOD pre-retirement courses are available either locally or in London, but in some cases individuals opt for courses at nearby colleges.

Staff leaving ABRO on early retirement or redundancy may take advantage of the MOD Outplacement Scheme (MODOPS), which provides a more extensive range of training and guidance than the standard pre-retirement courses. In the last 6 months some 53 ABRO employees have retired or been made redundant. Not all choose to attend a pre-retirement course, and in cases of medical retirement this often proves impractical. During that 6-month period, however, 21 have attended courses at their local college, 6 have attended local MOD pre-retirement courses and 7 have benefitted from the MOD Outplacement arrangements.

There are no plans to change existing arrangements.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 16 January 1996:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what action heads of his Department's executive agencies are taking to safeguard the provision of pre-retirement courses; and if he will make a statement has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA).

In DERA, despite a significant cost reduction programme, our policy on retirement is unchanged and pre-retirement courses continue to be provided for employees. The provision of such courses has been delegated to business sectors, but if the numbers of retirees does not merit a sector specific event, then individuals may be nominated to a central scheme.

Clearly DERA is always striving to improve it's efficiency and the cost effectiveness of all services, including the provision of pre-retirement courses is subject to regular review. However, it is our intention to continue to provide these courses since they are undoubtedly helpful to individuals approaching retirement since they provide guidance and help in making the transition.

I hope this information is helpful.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Attorney-General (1) what legal costs arising from the Scott inquiry have been incurred by his Department on behalf of Ministers and ex-Ministers; and if he will name the individuals concerned; [8753]

(2) what legal costs arising from the Scott inquiry have been incurred by the Department on behalf of current and past *(a)* civil servants and *(b)* advisers and secondees. [8748]

The Attorney-General: The legal costs paid to date for the legal secretariat to the Law Officers and Treasury Solicitor's Department in respect of issues arising from the Scott inquiry amount to £71,541. This sum covers advice obtained on behalf of Ministers and civil servants, both current and past. The costs of staff in the Treasury Solicitor's department providing legal services to client Departments in connection with the inquiry, are included in charges invoiced to Departments. Some legal advice has also been provided by departmental lawyers as part of their normal duties. The total cost of this advice is not quantifiable. It is not the Government's policy to identify the individuals who have received legal advice, either directly or indirectly.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Departmental Advertising Costs

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the expenditure of his *(a)* Department *(b)* agencies *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title for each year since 1990–91; and what estimate he has made for 1995–96 based on expenditure to date and existing plans. [6559]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: MAFF advertisements have appeared in the following national and regional newspapers, periodicals and magazines during the period 1990 to 1995. The lists by title represent a wide range of promotional activities designed to communicate essential or useful information to the trade—farmers and growers concerning a variety of EU or other schemes and codes of good agricultural practice—and to the general public, particularly consumers regarding food safety and nutrition. The costs shown are media costs only and do not include VAT or other production costs. Press advertising by MAFF agencies is the responsibility of their chief executives. I have asked them to reply direct to the hon. Member.

1995–96 (up to 13 December 1995)

	£
Arable Farming	2,502
Bella	55,500
Bella Favourites	1,350
Best	36,000
Bounty Babycare Guide	12,706
Bournemouth Evening Echo	262
British Farmer	3,569
Chat	28,000
Dairy Farmer and D Beef Prod	1,633
Estates Gazette	747
Famers Guardian	1,579
Farmers Weekly	12,761
Farming News	10,006
Farming News	4,701
London Gazette	150
Lymington Times	72
Mother and Baby	11,600
Parents	7,600
Scottish Farmer	290
Sheep Farmer	567
Southern Evening Echo	361
Take A Break	60,500
Times Educational Supplement	1,454
Woman	33,600
Womans Own	27,000
Total	314,509

1994–95

	£
British Farmer	735
Daily Mail	12,960
Environmental Health News	683
Family Circle	11,300
Farmers Guardian	2,352
Farmers Weekly	9,754
Farmers News	5,138
Farming News	2,520
Guardian	8,208
Independent	7,000
Meat Trades Journal	542
Nature	5,767
New Scientist	10,470
Port Health Authorities Handbook	572
Prima	22,000
Radio Times	16,000
Readers Digest	2,500
Sheep Farmer	601
Total	119,101

1993–94

	£
Aldershot News and Mail	529
Basingstoke Gazette	448
Bath (and West Evening) Chronicle	346
Bedfordshire Times	311
Berwick Advertiser	294
Birmingham Post	469
British Farmer	2,205
British Farmer	1,790
Cambridge Evening News	387
Chester Chronicle	352
Chichester Observer	230
Chronicle and Echo (Northampton)	400

1993–94

	£
Cornish Guardian	273
Cornish Times	141
Cornishman	103
Crewe Chronicle	294
Cumberland News	337
Dairy Farmer and Dairy Beef Producer	325
Darlington and Stockton Times	515
Darlington Northern Echo	931
Derby Evening Telegraph	567
Derbyshire Times	1,626
Dorset Evening Echo (Weymouth)	407
East Anglian Daily Times (Ipswich)	526
Eastern Daily Press (Norwich)	1,090
Essex Chronicle	506
Evening News (Worcester/Hereford)	419
Evesham Journal	335
Exeter Express and Echo	378
Express and Star West Midlands/Shropshire Star	1,137
Farmers Guardian	6,726
Farmers Weekly	15,034
Farming News	18,086
Folkestone Herald/Dover Express	218
Gloucester Citizen	551
Gloucestershire Echo (Cheltenham)	340
Greenwich/Woolwich Mercury Ser	312
Grimsby Evening Telegraph	217
Hampshire Chronicle	314
Harrogate Advertiser	438
Hastings Observer/Bexhill Observer	1,092
Herald Series (Oxford)	302
Hereford Time	415
Herts Advertiser (St. Albans)	429
Herts Mercury	312
Hexham Courant	180
Hitchin Comet Series	203
Horse and Hound	578
Hull Daily Mail	672
Isle of Wight County Press	288
Journal (Newcastle)	595
Kent and Sussex Courier	467
Kent Messenger	1,346
Lancaster Guardian	256
Lancaster Evening Post (Preston)	665
Leamington Spa (and Warwick) Courier	351
Leicester Mercury	925
Lincolnshire Echo	304
Liverpool Echo	881
Loughborough Echo	269
Manchester Evening News	1,510
Mansfield Chad	574
Nature	2,598
New Scientist	4,680
Newark Advertiser Series	432
News Post Leader (South Shields)	339
News/World-Sunday Magazine	21,945
North Devon Journal (Barnstaple)	260
Nottingham Evening Post	1,643
Ormskirk Advertiser Group	194
Oxford Times	869
Peterborough Evening Telegraph	478
Pig Farming	329
Radio Times	7,320
Reading Chronicle	838
Salisbury Journal	551
Sheffield Star	1,800
Shropshire Star	600
Somerset County Gazette	440
Southern Eve Echo	399
Stafford Newsletter	257
Stoke Evening Sentinel	630
Stratford upon Avon Herald	258
Surrey Advertiser	553
Surrey Mirror	319

1993–94

	£
Sussex Express	254
Telegraph and Argus (Bradford)	455
Tiverton Gazette Devon	176
Travel Trade Gazette—Europa	982
TV Times	3,939
Warrington Guardian	806
West Briton	315
Western Daily Press (Bristol)	591
Western Gazette (Somerset)	503
Western Morning News (Plymouth)	462
Westmorland Gazette	415
What's on TV	5,400
Wiltshire Gazette and Herald Series	317
Yorkshire Evening Press (York)	987
Yorkshire Post (Leeds)	963
Total	136,817

1992–93

	£
BBC Holidays	3,652
Barbara Long Ticket Wallet	11,813
Big Farm Weekly	2,625
Business Life	4,523
Butcher and Processor	840
Caterer and Hotelkeeper	2,495
Crops	1,055
Farmers Guardian	4,419
Farmers Weekly	7,650
Farming News	5,760
Fish Trader	1,028
Fishing News	3,182
Flower Trades Journal	525
Forces News	525
Fresh Produce Journal	1,996
Garden (The)	599
Grocer The	1,580
Grower	1,386
High Life	8,385
Horticulture Week	1,468
Lloyds List	344
Macmillan/S Cut Nautical Almanac	655
Nature	1,502
New Scientist	4,100
News/World—Sunday Magazine	45,087
Nurseryman and Garden Centre	1,160
RAF Wives	457
Radio Times	2,560
Radio Times	17,940
RAF News	486
Skyscene	6,300
SSAFA News	352
TV Times	8,070
What's on TV	10,470
Total	164,989

1991–92

	£
BBC Holidays	3,478
BBC Wild Life	2,118
Big Farm Weekly	1,890
British Homing World	254
Chat	2,127
Farmers Guardian	1,118
Farmers Weekly	1,620
Farming News	2,157
Forces Family Echo	798
High Life	15,972
Macmillan/S Cut Nautical Almanac	661

1991–92

	£
Mail on Sunday—You Magazine	1,750
Motor Boat and Yachting	2,008
News/World—Sunday Magazine	18,564
Official Hyde Parks Festival Magazine	5,040
Practical Boat Owner	1,667
Racing Pigeon Weekly	326
Radio Times	7,178
RAF News	463
Reeds Nautical Almanac	1,986
Sunday Express Magazine	11,075
Thomson Holiday Guides	2,127
TV Times	5,420
Votre Livre du Bord	1,290
Womans Weekly	2,448
Yachting Monthly	1,910
Yachting World	1,943
Total	97,388

1990–91

	£
British Tourist Authority	5,725
Country Life	2,100
DIT (Netherlands)	693
Editor	1,207
Fishing News	303
Fremdenverkehrswirtschaft	2,276
L'Agenzia Di Viaggi	731
E'Echo Touristique	3,229
Mother and Baby	1,900
Reeds Nautical Almanac	300
Sea Angler	368
Thomson Holiday Guides	16,239
Travel Express (Belgium)	1,200
Travel Trade Gazette	3,040
Total	39,311

Letter from T. W. A. Little to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 15 January 1996:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question on expenditure by the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (known as the Central Veterinary Laboratory until 30 September 1995) on newspaper advertising.

Figures for expenditure on newspaper advertising by the Central Veterinary Laboratory can be found in a reply to a question (No. 17610) from Mrs. Ann Taylor by Mr. Jack on 18 April 1995. Expenditure consists essentially of recruitment advertising in relevant trade journals and local papers.

Letter from J. M. Rutter to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 15 January 1996:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about expenditure on newspaper advertising by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate, listed by title for each year since 1990/91, as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible.

The VMD does not normally advertise directly in newspapers. The grant and expiry of Marketing Authorisations are announced in the official gazettes and the expenditure for 1994/95 was as follows:

	£
Belfast Gazette	2,683
London Gazette	4,377
Edinburgh Gazette	3,823
	10,833

It is anticipated that a similar amount will be spent in 1995/96. Figures for previous years are not available without incurring disproportional expense.

Letter from G. K. Bruce to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 15 January 1996:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply, in respect of the Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD) to your question about expenditure on newspaper advertising since 1990–91. The Directorate was established as an executive agency on 1 April 1993. Figures prior to this date are not available. In 1993/4, PSD spent £481 on newspaper advertising and £4,440 in 1994/5. All expenditure is directly attributable to recruitment advertising.

The 1993/4, 1994/5 and estimated 1995/6 figures can be broken down as follows:

	£
1993–94	
The Times and The Observer	391
The Review (free newspaper)	100
1994–95	
Yorkshire Press (Post/Evening Post)	2,719
New Scientist Magazine	1,721
1995–96	
New Scientist Magazine	2,000 (estimate)

Letter from Johnston McNeill to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 15 January 1996:

As Chief Executive of the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS), your question regarding expenditure on newspaper advertising for this agency has been passed to me for reply.

As you know, the MHS was established on 1 April 1995 and the expenditure for the period 1 April to 30 November was £25,095.66. The estimated figure for 1995/96 is £27,331.90.

Letter from Phillip Needham to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 15 January 1996:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to you concerning your question (PQ number 236) in which you asked details of the expenditure relating to newspaper advertising for each year since 1990/91.

ADAS was formed as an Executive Agency of MAFF in 1992. Any detail relating to expenditure prior to that date would be available from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

ADAS does not keep records of expenditure by title and we can only provide details of the total amount spent. The majority of advertising in both newspapers and journals relates to recruitment of staff and a relatively small amount is spent on advertising our commercial services. As you will know, ADAS operates as a commercial consultancy organisation providing a range of services to all the land-based industries.

Expenditure has been as follows:

1992/93: £52,000

1993/94: £49,000

1994/95: £102,000.

No estimates are available for 1995/96.

Letter from George Trevelyan to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 15 January 1996:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about newspaper advertising by title for this Agency a) for each year since 1990–91 and b) the estimate made for 1995–96 based on expenditure to date and existing plans.

The information in the form requested, by title, could not be provided without disproportionate cost

The advertising costs were for recruitment purposes and the totals were as follows:

Year	£
1990–91	19,409
1991–92	14,210
1992–93	1,640
1993–94	2,108
1994–95	10,164

The estimated advertising costs for 1995–96 for recruitment purposes in the Agency is £16,000 of which £8,145 has been spent to date

Letter from Professor P. I. Stanley to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 15 January 1996:

You asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to provide information for each of his executive agencies relating to expenditure on newspaper advertising by title in each financial year since 1990/91. The Minister has asked me to reply to you in respect of his Central Science Laboratory (CSL) Agency as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible. Our records show that you asked a similar question in February of this year relating to expenditure on all forms of advertising but I am now aware that incorrect data was given to you. I apologies for that error but can now provide the correct information.

CSL was first launched as a MAFF Executive Agency in April 1992. Thus my reply covers the years from 1992/93 to date. Further, the Agency was significantly enlarged in April 1994 following the merger with the MAFF Food Science Laboratories and this is reflected in increased expenditure from 1994/95.

You requested only newspaper expenditure and by title for each year. I regret that the information is not readily available in this form and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. However below are details of advertising expenditure, which includes advertising in specialist scientific journals as well as newspapers and is mainly for staff recruitment, as CSL is not involved in promotional advertising via this medium.

1992/93: £29.6K

1993/94: £50.0K

1994/95: £59.0K

1995/96: £89.8K (estimated).

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 14 December to the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice), how many of the bovines in which BSE was confirmed were from *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland and *(c)* Northern Ireland; and of the carcases, how many from each country were (i) cows, (ii) maiden heifers, (iii) steers and (iv) bulls. [7138]

Mrs. Browning: In his reply of 14 December to the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) *Official Report*, column *1094*, my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food gave the number of cases of BSE confirmed in the United Kingdom up to 8 December 1995 as 155,832. This was incorrect as the information given was for Great Britain and not the United Kingdom. The number of cases which has been confirmed in the United Kingdom at that date was 157,480.

Up to 15 December 1995, 157,767 cases of BSE had been confirmed in the United Kingdom, and of these 133,849 were confirmed in England, 7,508 in Scotland, 14,757 in Wales, and 1,653 in Northern Ireland.

Details of confirmed BSE cases are not recorded in a manner which permits retrieval in the format requested with respect to sex of the affected animal. For Great Britain and Northern Ireland, up to 15 December 1995, the available data can be broken down as follows:

Number of BSE cases

	Great Britain	Northern Ireland
Cows	155,656	1,651
Steers	23	0
Bulls	435	2

Support Payments

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total estimated amount of financial support received by the agricultural industry *(a)* from the European Union, *(b)* from the United Kingdom Government and *(c)* in total in each standard region and in the United Kingdom as a whole in each year since 1990 at constant prices indicating each figure as a percentage of the corresponding total. [8089]

Mr. Boswell: Expenditure on agriculture, fisheries and food on a financial year basis for the United Kingdom as a whole is set out in the table. Because of the nature of expenditure on certain programmes, it is not possible to identify support for the agricultural industry separately. A breakdown by standard region is not available.

Expenditure of UK Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at constant 1990–91 prices[1]

£ million (percentage of total)

	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	[2]1994–95
CAP Expenditure	1,663 (62)	1,603 (60)	1,612 (60)	2,405 (7)	2,162 (66)
Domestic Expenditure[3]	1,011 (38)	1,076 (40)	1,066 (40)	1,009 (30)	1,093 (34)
Total UK Expenditure	2,673 (100)	2,679 (100)	2,678 (100)	3,414 (100)	3,254 (100)

Notes:

[1] Figures adjusted by retail price index.

[2] Estimated outturn.

[3] Includes expenditure on schemes on which part EU financing is available. The majority of this financing does not coincide with the year in which it is incurred.

Source:

Departmental Report of Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and Intervention Board 1995, Annex 9.

Fish Management Regimes

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what studies his Department is carrying out into fish management regimes in *(a)* New Zealand, *(b)* Canada, *(c)* Norway and *(d)* other countries; and if he will make a statement. [8393]

Mr. Baldry: I am aware of the fish management regimes adopted in other countries such as New Zealand, Canada and Norway. These are of course geared to the specific circumstances of those countries and would not be directly applicable elsewhere. The Ministry's fisheries department liaises closely with other countries in matters of mutual interest. For example, it plays a full part in the work of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, ICES, and will be participating in EU working groups with Norway to discuss a range of conservation issues.

Fishing Treaties

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list each treaty currently in force between the European Economic Community and any *(a)* third nation, and *(b)* group of nations that provides opportunities for its member states to fish in waters not regarded as a Community resource; and if he will indicate for each treaty the member states taking up such schemes together with the approximate quantity or value of their annual catches. [8299]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* Fishing opportunities in third country waters and in the regulatory area of the North-West Atlantic Fisheries Organisation are set out in the table.

European community fisheries agreements with third countries and international organisations

Third country	*Opportunities available to EC*	*Allocation between Member States*
Angola	Licences for 5 surface longliners and 19 freezer tuna seiners. Opportunities for 6,550 GRT per month of shrimp trawlers; 1,900 GRT per month of demersal trawlers and 900 GRT per month of bottom set longliners with fixed gillnet.	Not allocated between Member States
Argentina	EC Quotas: 120,000 tonnes of hubbsi hake, 50,000 tonnes of Patagonian grenadier, 30,000 tonnes of illex squid and 50,000 tonnes of Patagonian rockcod or roughhead grenadier.	Not allocated between Member States
Cape Verde	Licences for 23 freezer tuna seiners, 17 pole-and-line tuna vessels and surface longliners, and 3 bottom longliners. A quota of 4,850 tonnes of tuna per annum is available	Not allocated between Member States
Comoros	Licences for 37 ocean-going freezer tuna vessels. A quota of 4,500 tonnes of tuna per annum is available	Not allocated between Member States
Equatorial Guinea	Licences for 47 freezer tuna seiners, 2 pole-and-line tuna vessels and 4 surface longliners. A quota of 2,750 tonnes of tuna per annum is available.	Not allocated between Member States
Estonia	1996 EC Quotas: 530 tonnes of cod, 10,500 tonnes of herring, 22,500 tonnes of sprat, and 4,500 salmon (individual fish) Denmark: 275 tonnes of cod, 5,700 tonnes of herring, 15,800 tonnes of sprat, and 2,430 salmon Finland: 80 tonnes of cod and 1,800 salmon Germany: 125 tonnes of cod, 4,300 tonnes of herring, 4,200 tonnes of sprat and 270 salmon Sweden: 50 tonnes of cod, 500 tonnes of herring and 2,500 tonnes of sprat	
Faroe Islands	1996 EC Quotas: 500 tonnes of cod/haddock, 2,500 tonnes of saithe, 7,000 tonnes of redfish, 3,600 tonnes of ling/blue ling, 25,000 tonnes of blue whiting, 1,000 tonnes of flatfish, 4,910 tonnes of mackerel and 760 tonnes of 'other' species	*UK*: 430 tonnes of cod/haddock, 580 tonnes of saithe, 75 tonnes of redfish, 205 tones of ling/blue ling, 11,000 tonnes of blue whiting, 680 tonnes of flatfish and 180 tonnes of 'other' species *Germany*: 10 tonnes of cod/haddock, 310 tonnes of saithe, 6,440 tonnes of redfish, 1,055 tonnes of ling/blue ling, 180 tonnes of flatfish and 305 tonnes of 'other' species *France*: 60 tonnes of cod/haddock, 1,510 tonnes of saithe, 435 tonnes of redfish, 2,340 tonnes of ling/blue ling, 140 tonnes of flatfish and 275 tonnes of 'other' species *Belgium*: 50 tonnes of saithe and 50 tonnes of redfish *Netherlands*: 50 tonnes of saithe *Denmark*: 11,000 tonnes of blue whiting and 4,910 tonnes of mackerel

European community fisheries agreements with third countries and international organisations

Third country	*Opportunities available to EC*	*Allocation between Member States*
Gambia	Licences for 23 freezer tuna seiners and 7 pole-and-line tuna vessels. Opportunities for 410 GRT per year of fresh fish trawlers, 2,000 GRT per year of freezer trawlers fishing for shrimps and 750 GRT per year of freezer trawlers fishing for other species.	Not allocated between Member States
Greenland	1996 EC Quotas: 31,000 tonnes of cod, 52,320 tonnes of redfish, 6,000 tonnes of Greenland halibut, 4,525 tonnes of deepwater prawns, 2,000 tonnes of catfish, 30,000 tonnes of blue whiting and 6,000 tonnes of roundnose grenadier.	*Germany*: 25,360 tonnes of cod, 51,665 tonnes of redfish, 4,590 tonnes of Greenland halibut, 2,000 tonnes of catfish, 24,000 tonnes of blue whiting and 4,950 tonnes of roundnose grenadier. *UK*: 5,640 tonnes of cod, 325 tonnes of redfish, 210 tonnes of Greenland halibut and 250 tonnes of roundnose grenadier. *France*: 330 tonnes of redfish, 1,012 tonnes of deep-water prawns and 3,000 tonnes of blue whiting. *Denmark*: 1,012 tonnes of deep-water prawns and 3,000 tonnes of blue whiting.
Guinea Bissau	Licences for 26 freezer tuna seiners and 16 pole-and-line tuna vessels and surface longliners. Opportunities for 8,800 GRT per month for freezer shrimp trawlers and 4,000 GRT per month of freezer fin-fish trawlers and cephalopod trawlers.	Not allocated between Member States
Guinea Conakry	Licences for 24 freezer tuna seiners, 10 pole-and-line tuna vessels and 5 surface longliners. Opportunities for 4,200 GRT per month of trawlers.	Not allocated between Member States
Iceland	1996 EC Quota: 3,000 tonnes of Redfish.	*Germany*: 1,690 tonnes. *UK*: 1,160 tonnes. *Belgium*: 100 tonnes. and *France*: 50 tonnes.
Ivory Coast	Licences for 46 tuna seiners and 7 pole-and-line tuna vessels and surface longliners. Opportunities for 600 GRT per month of freezer trawlers fishing for demersal species. A quota of 7,500 tonnes of tuna per annum is available.	Not allocated between Member States.
Latvia	1996 EC Quotas: 1,420 tonnes of cod, 3,500 tonnes of herring, 19,500 tonnes of sprat, and 6,500 salmon (individual fish). *Denmark*: 310 tonnes of cod, 1,715 tonnes of herring, 11,880 tonnes of sprat, and 1,800 salmon. *Finland*: 270 tonnes of cod, 500 tonnes of sprat and 3,000 salmon. *Germany*: 140 tonnes of cod, 1,285 tonnes of herring, 3,120 tonnes of sprat and 200 salmon. *Sweden*: 700 tonnes of cod, 500 tonnes of herring, 4,000 tonnes of sprat and 1,500 salmon.	
Lithuania	1996 EC Quotas: 2,125 tonnes of cod, 3,000 tonnes of herring, 12,000 tonnes of sprat, 25 tonnes of flatfish and 4,500 salmon (individual fish).	*Denmark*: 535 tonnes of cod, 1,715 tonnes herring, 5,925 of sprat and 1,800 salmon. Germany: 240 tonnes of cod, 1,285 tonnes of herring, 1,575 tonnes of sprat and 200 salmon. *Finland*: 200 tonnes of cod and 1,000 salmon. *Sweden*: 1,150 tonnes of cod, 4,500 tonnes of sprat, 25 tonnes of flatfish and 4,500 salmon.
Madagascar	Licences for 42 freezer tuna vessels and 16 surface longliners. A quota of 9,000 tonnes of tuna per annum is available. Not allocated between Member States.	

European community fisheries agreements with third countries and international organisations

Third country	*Opportunities available to EC*	*Allocation between Member States*
Mauritania	Licences for 34 freezer tuna seiners and 11 pole-and-line tuna vessels. Opportunities for 4,500 GRT per month of vessels fishing for crustaceans; 12,000 GRT per month of black hake trawlers and bottom longliners; 2,600 GRT per month of vessels fishing for deepwater demersal species and 300 GRT per month of pot vessels fishing for crawfish.	Not allocated between Member States
Mauritius	Licences for 20 ocean-going tuna seiners. Opportunities for 100 GRT per month of vessels fishing by line. A quota of 6,000 tonnes of tuna per annum is available.	Not allocated between Member States
Morocco	Opportunities in the period 1 December 1995 to 31 November 1996: 30,212 GRT per year of cephalopod vessels; 11,200 GRT per year of shrimp trawlers; 11,350 GRT per year of longliners; 1,300 GRT per year of seiners (Northern zone); 4,800 GRT per year of seiners (Southern zone); 1,550 GRT per year of artisanal vessels; 3,000 GRT per year of black hake trawlers; 1,300 GRT per year of pelagic trawlers; licences of 27 tuna vessels and for 5 vessels catching sponges.	*Spain:* 30,212 GRT per year of cephalopod vessels; 11,200 GRT per year of shrimp trawlers; 7,412 GRT per year of longliners; 1,300 GRT per year of seiners (North); 4,800 GRT per year of seiners (South); 1,550 GRT per year of artisanal vessels; 3,000 GRT per year of black hake trawlers; and licences for 17 tuna vessels. *France:* 1,300 GRT per year of pelagic trawlers and licences for 10 tuna vessels. *Portugal:* 3,938 GRT per year of longliners; Greece: licences for 5 vessels fishing for sponges. *UK:* 13,585 tonnes of cod; 2,300 tonnes of haddock; 500 tonnes of saithe; 400 tonnes of redfish; 50 tonnes of Greenland halibut and 240 tonnes of 'other' species
Norway	1996 EC Quotas: 30,050 tonnes of cod; 3,500 tonnes of haddock; 7,000 tonnes of saithe; 3,500 tonnes of redfish; 100 tonnes of Greenland halibut; 1,000 tonnes of blue whiting; 15,150 tonnes of mackerel, and 450 tonnes of 'other' species.	*Germany:* 3,500 tonnes of cod; 750 tonnes of haddock; 5,600 tonnes of saithe; 1,880 tonnes of redfish; 50 tonnes of Greenland halibut and 150 tonnes of 'other' species. *Spain:* 4,630 tonnes of cod and 190 tonnes of redfish. *Portugal:* 4,390 tonnes of cod and 810 tonnes of redfish. *Ireland:* 730 tonnes of cod. *Denmark:* 15,150 tonnes of mackerel.
Poland	1996 EC Quotas: 1,000 tonnes of herring; 15,000 tonnes of sprat; 50 tonnes of flatfish and 1,350 salmon (individual fish).All quotas to Sweden	
Senegal	Licences for 47 freezer tuna seiners, 11 pole-and-line tuna vessels and 6 surface longliners. Opportunities for 1,000 GRT per year of trawlers (inshore demersal fishing); 4,000 GRT per 4 month period of ocean-going fish trawlers; 1,000 GRT per year of freezer trawlers; 2,000 GRT per 4 month period of freezer trawlers, and 5,000 GRT per year of ocean-going shrimp freezer trawlers	Not allocated between Member States
Seychelles	Licences for 40 ocean-going freezer tuna seiners. A quota of 46,000 tonnes of tuna per annum is available.	Not allocated between Member States
Sao Tonne e Principe	Licences for 40 freezer tuna seiners and 8 pole-and-line tuna vessels and surface longliners. A quota of 9,000 tonnes of tuna per annum is available	Not allocated between Member States

European community fisheries agreements with third countries and international organisations

Third country	*Opportunities available to EC*	*Allocation between Member States*
North West Atlantic Fisheries Organisation (NAFO)	1996 EC Quotas: 5,485 tonnes of cod in Area 3M; 4,030 tonnes of redfish in Area 3M; 374 tonnes of redfish in Area 3LN; 11,070 tonnes of Greenland halibut in Area 3LMNO and 350 tonnes of shrimp in Area 3M. *Germany:* 513 tonnes of cod 3M; 374 tonnes of redfish 3LN, and 540 tonnes of Greenland halibut in 3LMNO. *Spain:* 1,574 tonnes of cod 3M; 7,399 tonnes of Greenland halibut 3LMNO, and 135 tonnes of shrimp 3M. *Portugal:* 2,155 tonnes of cod 3M; 3,121 tonnes of Greenland halibut 3LMNO and 70 tonnes of shrimp 3M. *France:* 221 tonnes of cod 3M. *UK:* 1,022 tonnes of cod 3M.	

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the articles of treaties signed by the United Kingdom which are the principal regulation of the European Economic Community, as published in its official journal that relate to and comprise the common fisheries policy; and what method of voting was used in the Council of Ministers to reach its decision in respect of each advance of that policy since 1966. [8298]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* The foundations of the common fisheries policy are to be found in articles 38 to 46 of the treaty of Rome 1956 to which the United Kingdom acceded by virtue of the treaty of accession of Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom. Articles 98 to 103 of the 1972 treaty relate specifically to fisheries. The treaty on European union of 1993 amended the treaty of Rome. Article 3 of the 1993 treaty specifically refers to fisheries. All three treaties were adopted by unanimity.

Bilateral Fisheries Arrangements (Norway)

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his policy on bilateral fisheries arrangements between the United Kingdom and Norway; and if he will make a statement. [8384]

Mr. Baldry: My aim is always to achieve the best possible deal for UK fishermen through the European Community's bilateral fisheries arrangements with Norway.

Fishing Vessels

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his policy in respect of removing more fishing vessels from the British fleet; what proposals he has to do this in accordance with the payment of adequate compensation to *(a)* vessel owners, *(b)* boat crews, *(c)* shore engineers and *(d)* merchants; and if he will make a statement. [8398]

Mr. Baldry: Under the terms of the EU's multi-annual guidance programme, the United Kingdom has to meet targets for the reduction of fishing effort in the period 1993–96, of which at least 55 per cent. must be achieved by the removal of capacity. Three rounds of decommissioning have already taken place and a further £24 million remains available.

Compensation to vessel owners takes the form of decommissioning grant, the amount of which is determined by competitive tender within the rules of the relevant statutory schemes. I have no plans to extend compensation to any other groups. The treatment of crews is already covered by employment law and social security schemes.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on how decommissioning of boats is taken into account when he is determining annual quota allocations for each United Kingdom port. [8397]

Mr. Baldry: The UK's fish quotas are not allocated by port but between the under 10 m fleet, all vessels which are 10 m or under in overall length; the sector, producer organisations whose membership includes vessels over 10 m in overall length; and the non-sector vessels over 10 m in overall length not in membership of producer organisations. The allocations reflect the licensed and registered vessels in each of these groups on 1 January of the quota year. Any vessel which had been decommissioned—deregistered and its licence surrendered—before 1 January would not be included in the distribution of allocation for the following year.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much money will have been paid *(a)* to Spanish fishermen and *(b)* to British boat-owners for decommissioning, in each of the past two years and in total by 1 April 1997; and if he will make a statement. [8401]

Mr. Baldry: In the United Kingdom, we spent £7.8 million in 1993 and £8.8 million in 1994 on decommissioning under the relevant UK statutory schemes. In the period 1993 to 1997, it is currently planned that a total of some £41 million will be paid, with a further £12 million available for 1997-98.

I have no information about expenditure in Spain.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many fishing vessels *(a)* registered in the United Kingdom and *(b)* registered by country in other countries, are fishing against United Kingdom total allowable catches for all species with effect from 1 January 1996; and if he will make a statement. [8391]

Mr. Baldry: Only fishing vessels registered in the United Kingdom, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man and holding fishing licences issued by the fisheries departments may fish for profit against UK quota. At 1 January 1996, some 8,500 vessels were licensed to fish for profit although not all vessels are entitled to fish for the full range of stocks subject to quota.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many British registered fishing vessels will have been decommissioned by 31 March 1996; and how many non-British registered fishing vessels, by country will be fishing in what were formerly British waters and fishing current British quotas by the same date. [8399]

Mr. Baldry: Under the United Kingdom's decommissioning schemes, for which only British registered vessels are eligible, a total of 297 vessels were decommissioned in 1993 and 1994. Applications in respect of a further 164 have been accepted under the 1995 scheme and owners have until 29 February 1996 to scrap their vessels.

No non-British registered fishing vessels are able to fish against British quotas in any waters.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has further to restrict fishing effort beyond the 1996 total allowable catch and further to reduce the fleet size; and if he will make a statement. [8365]

Mr. Baldry: Conservation policy requires a combination of measures to limit exploitation rates, including output limitation in the form of total allowable catches, TACs, and input limitations such as the reduction of fleet size through multi-annual guidance programmes, MAGPs. Decisions on TACs beyond 1996 will be taken by the Council of Ministers in the normal way. Decisions on the next series of MAGPs, covering the period 1997–99, are due to be taken this year. The UK will play a full and constructive role in all these discussions.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to change the decommissioning scheme to find alternative uses for boats besides scrapping them; and if he will make a statement. [8366]

Mr. Baldry: It is a requirement of Council regulation 3699/93 that decommissioned vessels are permanently excluded from fishing in Community waters and that vessels of less than 25 gross registered tonnes have to be scrapped to qualify for Community aid. In other cases, experience has shown that it is only by requiring vessels to be made permanently unseaworthy that we can guarantee meeting our obligations. Nevertheless, I am always willing to consider any suggestions an applicant may make for alternatives to scrapping which provide the same degree of certainty in protecting public expenditure.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what priority is accorded to advice from *(a)* scientists, *(b)* environmentalists and *(c)* industry representatives when their advice is conflicting when he is deciding what quota levels to accept in EU negotiations; how much weight is given to (i) economic consequences, (ii) social deprivation and (iii) fisheries dependence; and if he will make a statement. [8406]

Mr. Baldry: I am very concerned about the socio-economic consequences of changes to fisheries quotas. My priority is therefore to achieve the best possible deal for the fishing industry. To do this effectively, I take account of the scientific advice and the need to conserve the sea's resources.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what priority he attaches to the relative stability in setting quotas following the Factortame judgment of the European Court of Justice; and if he will make a statement. [8396]

Mr. Baldry: The UK has enjoyed considerable benefit from the application of relative stability as the basis for the apportionment of EU total allowable catches between members states. Although, following the Factortame judgment, we are unable to preclude vessels owned by interests from other member states from joining the UK register, the process of registration does not automatically confer access to UK fish quotas. A vessel must be licensed to fish and since new licences are no longer issued on demand, any vessel wishing to join the UK fishing fleet can do so only by acquiring a licence from a previously licensed vessel.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to amend the relative stability element of the common fisheries policy so that a quota in any species cannot be reduced in any year by more than a predetermined percentage figure from the previous year; and if he will make a statement. [8404]

Mr. Baldry: It is my policy to avoid unnecessarily sharp reductions in quotas. However, if a stock is declining rapidly, limiting the quota reduction to a predetermined percentage figure could have disastrous consequences with the fishery having to be completely closed in the following year. I believe that this is something that we should always seek to avoid.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what assessment he has made of the economic impact of quota reductions in the 1996 total allowable catches in respect of each United Kingdom port; and if he will make a statement; [8372]

(2) what assessment he has made of the information the EU Fisheries Commissioner holds on the diversity and impact of quota reductions on each part of the United Kingdom fishing industry with effect from 1 January 1996; and if he will make a statement. [8374]

Mr. Baldry: The reason for reducing certain fish quotas is to conserve stocks and thereby to ensure the future economic viability of the industry.

The European Commission takes account of the impact of quota reductions throughout the Community when it makes its proposals for total allowable catches. At the start of the negotiations on TACs for 1996, the level of UK quotas being considered for the stocks of most importance to our fishermen was some 88,000 tonnes lower than our 1995 quotas in cod equivalent terms. As a result of changes agreed at the Fisheries Council on 21–22 December 1995, the final level of quotas for the same stocks was some 34,000 lower than our 1995 quotas. This represents approximately £15 million in 1995 market prices.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to re-organise quota allocations and both sector and non-sector management on a purely regional basis; which regions he expects to recognise; and if he will make a statement. [8386]

Mr. Baldry: I have no plans to reorganise quota allocation and management on a regional basis. Fish producer organisations, which are responsible for the day-to-day management of the greater part of UK quotas, already operate on a regional basis. I have, however, made it clear to the fishing industry that I am prepared to look at proposals for changing the present management arrangements provided these are practicable and command wide support.

Common Fisheries Policy

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) when he expects his common fisheries policy review group to report to him; if he will publish their findings and submissions made to them in full; and if he will make a statement; [8402]

(2) when he expects to publish the findings of the common fisheries policy review group and his response to them; and if he will make a statement. [8388]

Mr. Baldry: I expect the common fisheries policy review group to report in the spring. I will make public both its report and the Government's response to it. The submissions received by the group will also be made available.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food with which part of the common fisheries policy relative stability and quota swaps conform; and what plans he has to balance them in the future negotiations with his EU counterparts; and if he will make a statement. [8405]

Mr. Baldry: The principle of relative stability is established under article 8(4) of the basic common fisheries policy regulation 3760/92. Quota swaps are permitted under article 9 of the same regulation. I have no plans to seek changes to either provision.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what advice his Department has given to other Government Departments on fish stocks and fish management to assist them in talks on EU enlargement with *(a)* the Baltic states, *(b)* former eastern bloc states and *(c)* other aspirant EU members; and if he will make a statement; [8395]

(2) what plans he has for the development of the United Kingdom fishing industry from 2002 onwards; and if he will make a statement; [8361]

(3) what assessment his Department has made as to how the common fisheries policy will have to be reformed to prepare for the accession of new member states to the EU; and if he will make a statement. [8379]

Mr. Baldry: The Ministry has advised on the importance of maintaining existing UK fishing opportunities in enlargement negotiations. Changes need to be made to the common fisheries policy whether or not the Community is enlarged. I shall continue to discuss with the industry what changes they would like to see in the period leading up to and at the review of the CFP in 2002.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the changes in the number of jobs in the fishing industry for each United Kingdom port for each year since the common fisheries policy began; and if he will make a statement. [8362]

Mr. Baldry: Such information as is available about the number of fishermen in UK ports over the period in question is published in tables 2.6 and 2.7 of "United Kingdom Sea Fisheries Statistics 1994" which is available in the Library. Information about jobs indirectly related to sea fishing is not available.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will commission a study into the benefits accruing to United Kingdom fishermen from Britain's participation in the common fisheries policy and what losses they have incurred by having United Kingdom fishing waters declared a common European resource; and if he will make a statement. [8364]

Mr. Baldry: The benefits to United Kingdom fishermen resulting from our participation in the common fisheries policy include: tighter restrictions than applied before we joined the Community in access by foreign vessels within our 12-mile fishery limits; a larger share of fish quotas in Community waters than was justified by our historic catch record in the 1973 to 1978 reference period used when quota shares were decided; fishing opportunities in the waters of non-member states secured through the Community's bilateral agreements with those countries; access to European Community grant schemes; a common policy on conservation rules enabling us to influence the rules applied in the waters of other member states to the benefit of our industry.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what interpretation his Department's officials make of open access by all member states to all waters when they are advising him and preparing for negotiations with the United Kingdom's partners on fisheries policy; and if he will make a statement; [8377]

(2) what estimate he has made of legal obstacles in the way of the Government beginning negotiations with the United Kingdom's EU partners to reform the common fisheries policy so that there is no common access to fish resources in all waters; what legal obstructions would prevent the United Kingdom leaving the common fisheries policy; and if he will make a statement. [8458]

Mr. Baldry: The Council of Ministers can decide by qualified majority on the basis of a proposal from the European Commission that there shall be no common access to fish resources in all waters. This, indeed, is the current arrangement.

I explained to the House on 22 November *Official Report*, column *591*. The steps that would be necessary for the United Kingdom to leave the common fisheries policy.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the policy of his EU counterparts to reform the common fisheries policy; and if he will make a statement. [8389]

Mr. Baldry: I shall discuss improvements to the common fisheries policy with my counterparts in other member states once I have considered the conclusions of the CFP review group.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to reduce the bureaucratic requirements placed on the fishing industry in respect of the common fisheries policy; and if he will make a statement. [8369]

Mr. Baldry: It is the Ministry's policy to keep to the minimum the burdens which the common fisheries policy places on the industry. A close dialogue is maintained with the industry and we welcome constructive proposals for deregulation in the fisheries sector.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what talks he has had recently and expects to have in the next three months with the EU Fisheries Commissioner on the state of *(a)* the British fishing industry, *(b)* the future of the common fisheries policy and *(c)* relative stability in the fishing industry; and if he will make a statement. [8373]

Mr. Baldry: Both before and during the Fisheries Council on 21–22 December 1995 I spoke to Mrs. Bonino about the state of the British fishing industry and the future of the common fisheries policy. I plan to have further discussions with her in March.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to consult hon. Members representing fisheries and the fishing industry before proceeding further towards reform of the common fisheries policy; and if he will make a statement. [8376]

Mr. Baldry: I will welcome the views of any hon. Member on ways of improving the common fisheries policy.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his policy on interpreting the "common resource open to all" basis of the common fisheries policy in respect of Spanish and Portuguese fishing vessels in former British waters *(a)* where there is historic evidence of their fleets fishing and *(b)* where there is no evidence of their fleets fishing; and if he will make a statement. [8378]

Mr. Baldry: Spanish and Portuguese fishing vessels have no access within the United Kingdom's 12-mile limits. Within our 200 mile limits, they are also excluded from the North sea, the Irish sea and the Bristol channel. These exclusions are based on historic fishing patterns.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in what circumstances he will bring forward to his EU counterparts a scheme to abandon the common fisheries policy altogether and reinstate sovereign waters with bilateral arrangements for fish management; and if he will make a statement. [8993]

Mr. Baldry: Proposing to scrap the common fisheries policy altogether is not a realistic option.

Fisheries Conservation

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will undertake research into franchising areas of sea to fishermen as an alternative to licensing boats; and if he will make a statement. [8403]

Mr. Baldry: I have no plans to undertake such research. Under Council regulation (EC) No. 3690/93 of 20 December 1993 establishing a Community system laying down rules for the minimum information to be contained in fishing licences, member states are required to operate a licensing system for fishing vessels.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to replace decommissioning as a tool of effort reduction, with closure of specified areas of seas during relevant spawning seasons; if he will make it his policy to allocate money set aside for decommissioning of fishing vessels to compensate all sectors of the fishing industry during such close seasons; and if he will make a statement. [8407]

Mr. Baldry: I have no such plans.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will undertake feasibility studies on effective policing of fisheries regulations by a system of closed sea areas during spawning seasons to replace the present licensing system; and if he will make a statement. [8387]

Mr. Baldry: There are a number of areas where fishing is controlled to protect young fish and to allow them to grow to maturity. The merits of any particular closed area have to be carefully evaluated, bearing in mind the mixed nature of our fisheries and the fact that fish will move in and out of areas. Nevertheless, protected areas are generally regarded as making a useful contribution to conservation. They are not, however, an alternative to the present licensing and TAC system because uncontrolled fishing effort outside such areas could outweigh the benefits achieved from closed spawning grounds.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what methods of control, management and conservation of the fish stocks of the United Kingdom he proposes to assess *(a)* in addition to and *(b)* instead of the current regime of the common fisheries policy; and if he will make a statement. [8375]

Mr. Baldry: Key elements in the common fisheries policy are the structural regime and the fisheries management regime.

The structural measures under the multi-annual guidance programmes are directed towards reducing the fishing effort of the fleets of member states to bring it better into line with fishing opportunities. The UK is spending £53 million on decommissioning fishing vessels to this end. We will be consulting the fishing industry prior to discussions on the changes needed for the next round of programmes starting in 1997. The fisheries management regime under the CFP is, like the regimes applied by many countries around the world, based on establishing total allowable catches which are administered as fishing quotas.

The quota management system applied by the UK is discussed with our industry each autumn to see whether changes should be made. At the most recent discussions there were no suggestions that any substantial changes would be helpful. However, the industry has been invited to see whether there are any changes which could usefully

be made which would be acceptable to the industry collectively. I am awaiting its response, which I shall consider carefully.

The management regime is also supported by technical conservation measures which deal with matters such as mesh sizes, minimum landing sizes and closed areas. The fisheries conservation group, which I have announced, will be examining ideas from fishermen to agree which are the most promising to seek to have introduced as improvements to the existing CFP conservation regime. Again, the fishing industry's constructive views will be vital.

Finally, the management regime includes the monitoring of fishing effort in western waters from January this year so that all member states comply with limits laid down last year. These will ensure that full Spanish integration into the CFP does not result in fishing effort rising above the specified levels. We shall be assessing the effectiveness and enforcement of these arrangements and, if necessary, seeking improvements to them. I shall welcome the views of the fishing industry.

Fisheries Policy

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what changes to his fisheries policy he expects to make arising from decisions taken by the House on fishing policy on 19 December 1995; and if he will make a statement. [8381]

Mr. Baldry: The votes taken in the House on 19 December confirmed my determination to continue to work for effective conservation of fish stocks, a fair allocation of fishing opportunities and rigorous enforcement of the controls that are in place.

Grant Schedules, Lowestoft

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on how new grant schemes for harbours, port facilities and fish marketing and processing will be available for projects at Lowestoft; how much money is potentially available for Lowestoft; and what advice his officials are giving to industry representatives at Lowestoft. [8383]

Mr. Baldry: Lowestoft has been designated as a fishery dependent area eligible for aid under the EU PESCA initiative, for which applications will shortly be invited. Appropriate projects in Lowestoft will also be eligible for grant aid for marketing and processing and port facilities under the EU's financial instrument for fisheries guidance, which will also be open to applications in the UK in the next few weeks. Aid under the existing national harbour grant scheme is already available.

All these schemes are competitive and each project will be considered on its merits before funds can be allocated. Officials are already in touch with industry representatives in Lowestoft and will be giving further advice when new schemes are launched.

Unemployment (Fishing Industry)

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has to compensate people employed in the fishing industry who become unemployed because of a reduction in fish quotas from 1995 to 1996. [8385]

Mr. Baldry: I have already announced that £24 million is available for decommissioning fishing vessels in 1996 and 1997.

In addition, under the PESCA initiative, which is designed to address the problems facing the fishing industry, up to £71 million of European and UK national or regional aid will be available until the end of 1999 for projects including the diversification and retraining in fishery dependent areas.

North Sea Pollution

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what studies his Department has undertaken in the last five years into the effects of pollution on fish stocks in the North sea; what steps he proposes to tackle pollution; and if he will make a statement. [8400]

Mr. Baldry: My Department annually monitors fish from all the waters around the English and Welsh coast. The results which are published show that where contamination can be detected the levels involved give no cause for concern. In addition, specific studies have been carried out and are continuing, to assess whether contaminants impair fish health. There is no convincing evidence to link fish mutation or disease with levels of contaminants found around the coast. Fish are safe to eat.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what priority is accorded to neighbourhood agreements with France and Ireland in his policy for fisheries management; what factors militate against their extension to other EU countries; and if he will list the differences between such neighbourhood agreements and bilateral agreements with other countries. [8408]

Mr. Baldry: The management of fisheries resources in Community waters is determined within the framework of the common fisheries policy. The UK maintains close contact with those member states whose waters adjoin British fishery limits on a wide range of issues including conservation and enforcement. Bilateral agreements with third countries are negotiated by the European Commission on behalf of the union.

Fishing Industry

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the size of the fishing industry on 1 January 1996 *(a)* by tonnage, *(b)* by number of registered vessels, *(c)* by number of people employed directly and *(d)* by number of people employed indirectly; what estimate he has made in respect of *(a)* to *(d)* for 1 January 2003; and if he will make a statement. [8367]

Mr. Baldry: The latest available information is published in table 2:1 and 2:6 of the "UK Sea Fisheries Statistics", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. Information on the number of people indirectly employed in the fishing industry is not available. We have not made any comparable estimates for the year 2003.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to protect the livelihoods of fishermen using small, open boats from beaches for less than a day at a time; and if he will make a statement. [8368]

Mr. Baldry: Quota allocations are set aside for the under 10m fleet and these have been underpinned since 1994.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to apply the same principle to fishing and the European Court of Justice as the German constitutional court; and if he will make a statement. [8390]

Mr. Baldry: I have no plans to do so. All member states are obliged to abide by the rulings of the European Court of Justice.

Intergovernmental Conference

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will take steps to have fishing policy placed on the agenda for the intergovernmental conference on the future of Europe; and if he will make a statement. [8380]

Mr. Baldry: The purpose of the intergovernmental conference is to discuss possible treaty amendments. Improvements are needed to the common fisheries policy but these can be achieved within the present treaty provisions.

Dolphins

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place in the Library a copy of the report commissioned by his Department into dolphin deaths in tuna fishing nets off the western coasts of Britain and Europe in summer 1995. [9386]

Mr. Baldry: On 20 December I placed a copy of the sea mammal research unit's report "Cetacean bycatch in the UK tuna driftnet fishery in 1995" in the Library.

Orange Juice

Mr. Biffen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he has taken to ensure that the United Kingdom freshly squeezed orange juice industry has continued access to the raw materials that it needs. [9777]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The price of raw materials used by the freshly squeezed orange juice industry would have been significantly increased by Community legislation on import tariffs. This would have had severe economic consequences for an innovative and growing sector. I made clear to Commissioner Fischler that this would be completely unacceptable.

We have succeeded in persuading the Commission to take note of our very genuine concerns. A temporary measure has now been adopted that will ensure that our processors have access to the raw materials they need at realistic prices. This is good news for importers, processors and consumers. We will continue to work towards a permanent solution so that our industry can plan ahead for the years to come.

Sheep and Cow Premiums

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to re-assess producers' entitlement to developers' quota from the 1993 sheep annual premium and suckler cow premium quota national reserves following the judgment of Mr. Justice Macpherson in the English High Court on 22 June 1995; and what provision he is making to compensate producers adversely affected by his Department's actions. [9708]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have today laid before Parliament the Sheep Annual Premium and Suckler Cow Premium Quota (Re-assessment of Eligibility) Regulations 1996. These regulations put in place arrangements for the re-assessment, in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, of applications for "developers" quota from a special reserve using new guidelines governing eligibility. The farming and landowning organisations have been fully consulted on the purpose and content of the regulations.

Where these arrangements adversely affect producers they will be entitled to compensation. The general principles forming the basis of compensation as currently envisaged are as follows:

1. Producers whose applications for 'developers' quota are newly assessed as eligible will be entitled to:

either

if they acquired quota by transfer or lease for any or all of the scheme years 1993 to 1996 for SAPS and 1993 to 1995 for SCPS reimbursement of the cost of acquiring that quota up to a maximum of the amount of quota that they should have received under category 3c;

or

if they did not acquire quota by transfer or lease for all or any of the scheme years 1993 to 1995 and can demonstrate that the eligible animals that would have been covered by that quota were retained on the holding during the relevant retention periods, reimbursement of the value of the premium they would have received on the eligible animals during 1993 to 1995 up to a maximum of the amount of quota that they should have received under category 3c;

and

where appropriate, an award of quota in accordance with the Regulations.

2. Those individuals (or their personal representatives) who are unable to apply for quota from the special reserve but who would have been entitled to receive "developers" quota from the 1993 national reserve had the new eligibility guidelines been used originally:

will be entitled to compensation equivalent to that in paragraph 1.

3. Where producers who have quota withdrawn from them to meet the new demand for "developers" quota:

they will be entitled to a compensation payment with which they can, if they wish, purchase quota through the open market to replace that withdrawn, and

their entitlement to 1996 SAPS payments in respect of any withdrawn quota will be honoured provided that the producers concerned meet the Scheme rules

4. Other producers

Where producers consider that compensation not provided for in paragraphs 1 to 3 above is due to them as a result of the re-assessment exercise, they will be able to submit details of their case for consideration by the appropriate Agriculture Department.

5 Practical arrangements

In most cases it will be possible only to determine those who may be eligible for compensation and the amounts due once all applications have been assessed, the final demand for quota has been established and quota has been allocated. This will not be before the summer of 1996.

The aim is to draw up standard terms for compensation—which will be agreed with farming and landowning organisations—which will simplify the process for claiming compensation for most farmers.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Nursery Staff

Mr. Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many qualified *(a)* nursery teachers and *(b)* nursery nurses of working age there are in the United Kingdom. [8279]

Mr. Robin Squire: The available information shows that there were 7,281 full-time equivalent, FTE, qualified teachers and 9,308 FTE qualified nursery assistants employed in maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in maintained primary schools in England in January 1995. At that time there were a further 8,103 FTE qualified nursery assistants employed in other classes in maintained primary schools in England.

Information about the number of staff employed in schools in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales, for Scotland and for Northern Ireland respectively.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what capital funding allocations have been made for grant-maintained schools for 1996–97; and if she will list the allocations per school. [9061]

Mr. Robin Squire: Capital allocations to grant-maintained schools are a matter for the Funding Agency for Schools for England. I have asked the chairman of the funding agency to write to the hon. Member.

Pre-school Provision

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the number and percentage of children under the age of five years who have a place in *(a)* reception classes in schools, *(b)* nursery classes in schools and *(c)* nursery schools by each local education authority area and nationally. [9060]

Mr. Robin Squire: The available information on pupils aged under five in maintained nursery and primary schools in each local education authority in England is shown in the table:

Provision of education for under fives in maintained nursery and primary schools in each Local Education Authority area in England—January 1995

	Nursery schools		*Primary schools*			
			Nursery classes		*Infant classes*[1]	
	Pupils[1]	*Percentage of population*[2]	*Pupils*[1]	*Percentage of population*[2]	*Pupils*[1]	*Percentage of population*[2]
Camden	61	1	955	23	1,015	24
Greenwich	647	10	2,635	39	1,024	15
Hackney	149	2	2,172	33	1,587	24
Hammersmith and Fulham	554	14	1,167	31	568	15
Islington	319	6	1,575	31	1,466	29
Kensington and Chelsea	249	7	608	18	385	12
Lambeth	450	6	2,011	25	1,018	13
Lewisham	231	3	2,431	33	1,131	15
Southwark	535	7	2,562	35	2,120	29
Tower Hamlets	721	12	2,635	45	1,705	29
Wandsworth	216	3	2,176	32	1,624	24
Westminster	190	5	993	25	574	14
Barking and Dagenham	0	0	2,054	42	1,623	34
Barnet	575	7	2,095	25	2,205	26
Bexley	0	0	1,442	23	2,074	33
Brent	223	3	2,377	33	1,974	27
Bromley	0	0	172	2	2,385	34
Croydon	499	5	1,512	16	2,883	30
Ealing	454	5	3,265	39	2,426	29
Enfield	0	0	1,663	22	2,389	31
Haringey	223	4	2,519	40	1,848	29
Harrow	0	0	1,009	18	1,626	29
Havering	0	0	495	9	1,984	35
Hillingdon	120	2	3,234	47	87	1
Hounslow	0	0	2,363	41	1,725	30
Kingston upon Thames	242	7	967	28	1,038	30
Merton	0	0	2,713	55	983	20
Newham	959	11	3,496	40	1,280	15
Redbridge	0	0	1,326	21	1,397	22
Richmond upon Thames	68	2	670	16	1,114	26
Sutton	240	5	1,727	36	64	1
Waltham Forest	308	4	2,405	34	1,044	15

Provision of education for under fives in maintained nursery and primary schools in each Local Education Authority area in England—January 1995

	Nursery schools		Primary schools			
			Nursery classes		Infant classes[1]	
	Pupils[1]	Percentage of population[2]	Pupils[1]	Percentage of population[2]	Pupils[1]	Percentage of population[2]
Birmingham	2,411	8	8,538	27	10,019	31
Coventry	141	2	1,984	22	2,788	31
Dudley	70	1	2,992	36	2,707	33
Sandwell	128	1	4,537	53	2,840	33
Solihull	0	0	1,880	36	1,949	37
Walsall	839	11	3,557	47	2,465	33
Wolverhampton	848	12	3,050	42	2,262	31
Knowsley	0	0	3,003	61	1,679	34
Liverpool	564	4	5,698	42	4,483	33
St. Helens	80	2	1,605	33	1,574	33
Sefton	318	4	2,440	32	2,507	32
Wirral	319	4	1,954	22	2,933	33
Bolton	491	6	2,694	35	2,618	34
Bury	159	3	1,379	27	1,595	31
Manchester	542	4	7,039	50	2,429	17
Oldham	0	0	2,458	37	2,236	34
Rochdale	912	14	1,233	19	2,112	32
Salford	1,075	16	2,456	37	2,264	34
Stockport	936	12	1,146	15	2,483	33
Tameside	281	4	2,287	35	2,135	33
Trafford	0	0	2,526	42	1,919	32
Wigan	190	2	1,986	23	2,732	32
Barnsley	181	3	2,812	45	1,101	18
Doncaster	0	0	3,667	45	2,817	34
Rotherham	403	6	2,924	40	1,160	16
Sheffield	851	6	4,849	35	2,438	18
Bradford	521	3	5,965	40	4,135	28
Calderdale	0	0	1,946	36	1,866	35
Kirklees	548	5	3,890	35	3,509	31
Leeds	77	0	9,170	46	5,730	29
Wakefield	481	5	4,363	49	1,770	20
Gateshead	73	1	1,801	35	1,653	32
Newcastle upon Tyne	622	8	2,295	31	2,289	31
North Tyneside	226	5	2,468	51	1,682	35
South Tyneside	454	11	1,781	43	1,388	33
Sunderland	1,042	13	2,405	29	2,611	31
Avon	1,799	7	3,434	14	7,930	32
Bedfordshire	1,476	9	3,744	23	2,918	18
Berkshire	2,203	10	4,657	22	777	4
Buckinghamshire	571	3	2,469	13	3,100	17
Cambridge	734	4	1,497	8	5,842	31
Cheshire	869	3	4,614	18	8,323	32
Cleveland	154	1	9,368	59	5,241	33
Cornwall[4]	111	1	1,555	14	3,617	32
Cumbria	817	7	2,224	18	4,066	33
Derbyshire	1,573	6	8,132	32	5,768	23
Devon	315	1	2,697	11	4,240	17
Dorset	0	0	841	6	5,000	33
Durham	2,618	16	4,645	29	5,112	32
East Sussex	258	2	1,367	8	5,186	30
Essex	300	1	2,386	6	8,694	21
Gloucestershire	0	0	27	0	4,616	33
Hampshire	339	1	1,638	4	13,645	32
Hereford and Worcester	0	0	1,682	9	2,953	16
Hertfordshire	1,743	6	7,780	28	5,374	19
Humberside	1,163	5	8,080	33	5,400	22
Isle of Wight	0	0	175	7	922	35
Kent	83	0	2,125	5	13,509	33
Lancashire	3,664	9	4,466	11	12,867	33
Leicestershire	51	0	5,219	20	4,762	19
Lincolnshire	531	4	1,536	11	4,912	34
Norfolk	404	2	857	5	5,646	31
North Yorkshire	373	2	3,512	20	5,362	30
Northamptonshire	616	4	2,429	14	5,478	32
Northumberland	128	2	2,923	40	2,498	34
Nottinghamshire	595	2	13,169	48	2,099	8
Oxfordshire	1,079	6	2,148	13	1,317	8
Shropshire	176	2	1,844	17	2,127	19
Somerset	0	0	587	5	3,901	33

Provision of education for under fives in maintained nursery and primary schools in each Local Education Authority area in England—January 1995

	Nursery schools		Primary schools			
			Nursery classes		Infant classes[3]	
	Pupils[1]	Percentage of population[2]	Pupils[1]	Percentage of population[2]	Pupils[1]	Percentage of population[2]
Staffordshire	2,077	7	4,976	18	9,068	32
Suffolk	101	1	2,977	17	2,591	15
Surrey	428	2	2,635	10	7,078	27
Warwickshire	759	6	1,425	11	4,228	33
West Sussex	434	2	811	5	3,011	17
Wiltshire	0	0	577	4	3,388	21
England[4,5]	52,558	4	303,462	23	343,824	26

[1] Excludes pupils who became 5 years of age by 1 January 1995.
[2] Pupils aged 3 and 4 years old expressed as a percentage of the 3 and 4 year old population at 31 December 1994.
[3] Includes reception and other classes.
[4] Includes the Isle of Scilly.
[5] Includes the Corporation of London.

Access to Work Scheme

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 14 December to the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton), *Official Report*, column *738*, if the new criteria to be applied to eligibility for the access to work scheme will exclude those disabled people who are seeking jobs through development of self-employment; and if she will make a statement. [9054]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. David Blunkett, dated January 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the eligibility for Access to Work of self-employed disabled people.

The refocussing of Access to Work announced by the Secretary of State on 14 December applies to self-employed disabled people in exactly the same way as it does to disabled people who are employed. From 18 December applications will be considered only from people who, at the time of their application, have been unemployed for at least four weeks. This applies whether a person is entering self-employment or starting work as an employed person.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if the changes in the criteria for eligibility introduced from 18 December 1995 will apply to those who have already made applications for assistance under access to work before that date; and if she will make a statement. [8954]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. David Blunkett, dated January 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the eligibility for Access to Work of people who applied before 18 December.

Everyone who made an application for Access to Work before 18 December, even if their application had not been decided at that date, will be eligible to be considered for support.

The announcement refocussed the support available from the Access to Work programme towards those who need it most—unemployed disabled people; and those to whom we have already made commitments. Those disabled people who are still eligible to apply for Access to Work will continue to be considered for the full range support available.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many applicants for access to work who had made formal applications had been waiting three months or more, by 18 December 1995, for their applications to be processed. [8953]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. David Blunkett, dated January 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about waiting times for people who have made applications for Access to Work support.

Access to Work is delivered locally through Placing, Assessment and Counselling Teams (PACTS). Local managers are responsible for delivery and I have set them a target of completing action plans for 80% of Access to Work clients within 3 weeks of their applying. If the actual provision of the support is likely to take some time, PACTs seek alternative ways of helping the client.

Local managers are responsible for monitoring the operation of Access to Work and for achieving the set targets. This level of detail of monitoring information is not kept centrally, and I cannot therefore say how many people have to wait for three months or more for their applications to be processed.

However, we are undertaking a review of Access to Work and research to support the review has examined in detail the operation of the programme. This research will be published shortly.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what sum of money is available under access to work in 1995–96; and what is the amount proposed for 1996–97. [8955]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. David Blunkett, dated January 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the money available for Access to Work in 1995/96 and 1996/97.

The amount of money allocated to the Access to Work programme for 1995/96 is £13.4m but, as the Secretary of State announced on 14 December, additional funds have been made available for this year. However, I cannot of course say what the total spend will be until the end of the year.

The amount of money allocated to the programme for 1996/97 has been maintained at the planned level of £12.9m.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received about the access to work scheme; what has been the nature of these representations; and what her response has been. [9182]

Mr. Paice: Since the announcement about access to work, made on 14 December by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, we have received requests for further clarification of the announcement; expressions of concern about the immediate measures taken; and requests for information about the review of the programme and its future operation. Replies have provided the clarification and information requested where appropriate.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to alter the access to work scheme; if extra funds will be made available; and if she will make a statement. [9181]

Mr. Paice: An announcement was made by the Secretary of State on 14 December 1995, *Official Report* column *738*, about the access to work programme and its funding.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what action heads of her Department's executive agencies are taking to safeguard the provision of pre-retirement courses; and if she will make a statement. [9150]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Employment Service offers, on a voluntary basis, pre-retirement courses to people approaching retirement. These courses will continue to be offered in future.

The staff in the Teachers Pensions Agency, being employees of the Department for Education and Employment, are invited to attend a pre-retirement course when approaching retirement. There are no plans to discontinue the practice of providing pre-retirement courses for these staff.

Provision of pre-retirement courses forms part of the recommended standards of principal civil service pension scheme service quality and delivery published by Cabinet Office (Office of Public Service).

Nursery Education

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has made to enable local education authorities to recoup the costs of providing nursery education for children who are resident in neighbouring local education authorities; and if she plans to put the recoupment on a statutory basis. [8718]

Mr. Robin Squire: Local education authorities can recoup the costs of providing nursery education for pupils who are resident in neighbouring areas under voluntary agreements. My right hon. Friend has no immediate plans to remove such local discretion but will keep all the funding arrangements for nursery education under review.

Ms Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what action she is taking to make sure that adequate resources are available for the provision of pre-school education for special needs children. [9052]

Mr. Squire: Vouchers will be available for all four year-olds. The responsibilities of local authorities to identify and make a statutory assessment of those children who may need a statement, to make a statement where appropriate and to satisfy themselves that provision is made available in accordance with the statement, remain unchanged.

We are also considering requiring all providers in the private and voluntary sectors to have regard to the special education needs code of practice. We will discuss the impact of such a requirement with interested parties during the first phase.

Ms Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what financial arrangements she will make to assist local education authorities who wish to offer education for under-fives on a full-time basis. [8725]

Mr. Squire: Local education authority budgets will be reduced by the voucher value only in respect of each four-year-old in a maintained school, taking termly attendance into account. Where LEAs spend in excess of the voucher value, on full-time places or otherwise, they will retain the funding to do so.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimates her Department has made of shortfalls in respect of places for four-year-olds in *(a)* Wandsworth, *(b)* Westminster, *(c)* Kensington and Chelsea and *(d)* Norfolk expressed as (i) the number and (ii) the percentage of all four-year-olds in each local education authority. [8934]

Mr. Squire: Estimates of participation become less reliable when broken down by both year group and local education authority area. However, the best estimates of the number and percentage of four-year-olds in January 1995 in the phase 1 LEAs without a place in the maintained sector are given in the table:

LEA	*Estimated number of four year olds without a place in the maintained sector in January 1995*	*Estimated percentage of four year olds without a place in the maintained sector in January 1995*
Wandsworth	700	20
Westminster	800	40

LEA	*Estimated number of four year olds without a place in the maintained sector in January 1995*	*Estimated percentage of four year olds without a place in the maintained sector in January 1995*
Kensington and Chelsea	850	50
Norfolk	3000	30

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what measures she will be taking to evaluate the impact of the nursery voucher scheme on provision for three-year-olds; [8930]

(2) what measures she will be taking to evaluate the impact of the nursery voucher scheme on participation and educational attainment of children with special educational needs; [8928]

(3) what measures she will be taking to evaluate the impact of the nursery voucher scheme on the educational attainment of the children involved; [8931]

(4) what measures she will be taking to evaluate the impact of the nursery voucher scheme on participation and educational attainment of children from ethnic minority groups. [8929]

Mr. Squire: The effectiveness of voucher issue and redemption will be assessed using information provided by the voucher contractor. The standards of provision will become known as the inspection regime yields inspection reports. The longer-term impact of the scheme cannot be assessed until data are available on children's later educational achievements.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimates she has made of the number of Ofsted registered nursery education inspectors necessary to carry out inspections of voucher-redeeming institutions in *(a)* phase 1 and *(b)* phase 2 of the voucher scheme. [8936]

Mr. Squire: Initial planning estimates indicate that for the first and second phases of the scheme, some 200 and 4,000 registered nursery education inspectors respectively will be required. The precise number will depend mainly upon the number of providers who take part in the scheme.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what information she intends to request of *(a)* the pilot local authorities, *(b)* pre-school providers, *(c)* Capita Managed Services Ltd. and *(d)* parents of four-year-olds in order to evaluate the operation of the nursery voucher scheme in phase 1. [8932]

Mr. Squire: Capita Managed Services Ltd. will provide information for the phase 1 areas on the number of institutions which have joined the scheme, as well as the issue and redemption of vouchers. The local authorities and participating institutions will be able to comment on the administrative arrangements. Any views made known by parents will also be carefully considered.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimates she has made of the number of inspections by Ofsted of voucher-redeeming institutions that will be required in *(a)* phase 1 and *(b)* phase 2 of the voucher scheme. [8937]

Mr. Squire: Setting aside maintained schools which are already subject to regular inspections by Ofsted, initial planning estimates indicate that for the first and second phases of the scheme some 600 and 12,000 inspections of voucher redeeming establishments will be required. The precise number will depend upon the number of providers who take part in the scheme.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if parents will be able to redeem their vouchers for nursery provision during school holidays. [8933]

Mr. Squire: The voucher will cover a minimum of 36 weeks spread over three terms. In maintained schools it will cover the full school term. In the private and voluntary sectors it will be open to providers to offer more provision.

Nursery Voucher Scheme

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many nursery providers in the nursery voucher pilot scheme areas have been sent application forms; and how many providers have applied to participate in the scheme. [8727]

Mr. Robin Squire: All local education authority-maintained schools in the phase 1 areas have been invited to apply either directly or through their LEA. All grant-maintained and independent schools, and institutions registered under the Children Act 1989 in these areas, have been sent application forms. The voucher contractor has so far received over 500 applications to join the scheme.

Ms Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many nursery voucher application forms have been sent out to parents in the nursery voucher pilot scheme areas. [8726]

Mr. Squire: Some 11,800 application forms were sent out in the first mailing.

Ms Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidance she will give to nursery providers who wish to apply for loans for capital works on the strength of expected voucher income; and what expressions of interest have been made by financial institutions with regard to providing capital funding to nursery providers. [8730]

Mr. Squire: Providers in the private and voluntary sectors will be able to apply for commercial loans on the strength of voucher income. Subject to parliamentary approval, grant-maintained schools will be given the power to borrow. They and other maintained schools will be able to take advantage of the freedoms provided by the private finance initiative to enter into partnerships with the private sector. The Department does not retain information about financial institutions which wish to provide capital funding to nursery providers.

Unemployment, Walthamstow

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what information is available regarding the lengths of periods of unemployment benefit

disqualification imposed by adjudication officers in the area which includes Walthamstow. [8976]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Neil Gerrard, dated January 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the lengths of periods of unemployment benefit disqualifications imposed by adjudication officers in the area which includes Walthamstow.

The Employment Service (ES) does not record statistics relating to periods of disqualifications. However we do publish, quarterly, reports on the volumes of adjudicated decisions both nationally and by ES region. We are unable to provide adjudicated decision based on Parliamentary constituencies.

The publication, entitled "Analysis of Adjudication Officers' Decisions", details cases allowed and disqualified (or disallowed), by question type. The latest information can be obtained from the House of Commons library.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people in Walthamstow have experienced a period of unemployment since April 1992. [8974]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Neil Gerrard, dated January 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question regarding unemployment in Walthamstow.

The Employment Service does not record statistics relating to the number of people who have experienced a period of unemployment.

I can, however, advise you that the number of new claims for unemployment-related benefit made in the constituency of Walthamstow between April 1992 and November 1995 was 22,433. (Data obtained from Central Statistical Office—NOMIS)

As this figure reflects the number of claims rather than the number of clients, people who have left and rejoined the register will have been recorded each time they made a new claim.

I hope this is helpful.

Nursery Education (Inspection)

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what plans she has made to provide additional training in early years education for Ofsted inspectors; [8729]

(2) how many registered Ofsted inspectors have *(a)* early years teaching qualifications and *(b)* early years teaching experience. [8728]

Mr. Robin Squire: These are matters for Her Majesty's chief inspectors of schools, who heads the Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

Primary Literacy and Numeracy Centres

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in which areas the establishment of the primary literacy and numeracy centres link will relate to the activities of *(a)* universities and *(b)* colleges. [8878]

Mr. Robin Squire: In selecting local education authorities to take part in the initiative, one of the criteria against which applications will be assessed is the quality of proposals for involving other partners, including higher education and the private sector, in supporting and extending the work.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what existing resources will be drawn on in the establishment of the primary literacy and numeracy centres. [8927]

Mr. Squire: A new grant for educational support and training specific grant will provide for £5 million of expenditure in 1996–97. The Department wrote to all local education authorities on 5 January inviting them to participate. That letter gives further details of how the project will be expected to link into current work in LEAs and draw upon work being carried out by other partners in the project, including Ofsted, the Basic Skills Agency, the Teacher Training Agency and the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority. A copy of the letter has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses and I will arrange for a copy to be sent to the hon. Member.

Teacher Training

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list *(a)* the number of places and *(b)* the total funding allocated by the Teacher Training Agency for (i) the primary and (ii) the secondary sector for 1996–97. [8879]

Mr. Robin Squire: The allocation of student places and funding for initial teacher training is the responsibility of the Teacher Training Agency. I have therefore asked the chairman of the Teacher Training Agency to write to the hon. Member with this information.

School Inspections

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was Ofsted's target number of inspections per year in *(a)* the primary and *(b)* the secondary sector in the current cycle; and what the actual number of inspections has been in both sectors for each year since the beginning of the cycle. [8956]

Mr. Robin Squire: This is a matter for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, who heads the Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

Environmental Pollution Report

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on what dates and on what matters, in connection with the 18th report of the Royal Commission on environmental pollution, "Transport and the Enviornment", she has made representations to the Secretary of State for Transport. [9098]

Mr. Forth: The Department has no major direct interest in the royal commission's report, but we have been kept in touch with colleagues' consideration of the

issues. No such representations have been made by the Department, by the former Department for Education or by the former Employment Department.

School Maintenance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimates she has of the backlog of maintenance repairs in schools at the latest date for which figures are available. [8935]

Mrs. Gillan: Estimates based on a 1991 National Audit Office report suggest that the cost of maintenance repairs to local authority school buildings may be around £1.4 billion at current prices. However, since 1990–91, some £3.5 billion has been made available from all sources for capital work at all schools in England.

Reading Tests

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list those education authorities which carry out average reading score tests in *(a)* all or *(b)* some of their primary schools. [9051]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Work Funding

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total cost of the evaluation of training for work funding pilots carried out by Coopers and Lybrand. [9520]

Mr. Forth: The evaluation cost £123,024.

Training Programmes

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what were the outcome figures for employment training in 1994 and for community action between April 1994 and March 1994; and if he will make a statement. [9694]

Mr. Paice: The information available is given in the table:

Training for work/Community action
England and Wales — *Percentage*

1994–95	*Proportion of leavers who:* *Were in a job*[1]	*Obtained a positive outcome*[2]	*Gained a qualification or a credit towards one*
Training for work	38	42	45
Community action	15	28	n/a

Notes: n/a—Information not applicable.
[1] Full-time, part-time and self-employment
[2] In a job, full-time education or other government training.
Source:
Training for work national follow-up survey, community action follow-up survey.

Training

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she plans to publish the plan compiled by the efficiency unit, designed to reduce administrative burdens and changes on training and enterprise councils and providers of training. [9702]

Mr. Paice: The Department published a report on 14 December following an efficiency scrutiny into the TEC contract and management fee. A copy is in the House of Commons Library.

National Minimum Wage

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will set out in domestic currency statutory national minimum wage, or the minimum wage established on the basis of collective bargaining, in key industries in each European Union state and in the United State of America, Sweden and Japan; if she will indicate the equivalent of each of these amounts in pounds sterling at purchasing power parity exchange rates; and what percentage of average earnings in each of these countries the current national minimum wage represents. [8341]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* I have been asked to reply.

The following table gives the current statutory national minimum wage for each European Union state, the United States of America and Japan in the domestic currency and each of these amounts at purchasing power parity exchange rates. The other information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

	Minimum wage level *Own currency*	*At purchasing power parity*[1] *exchange rates* *Sterling £*
Belgium	BF 43,318 monthly	739.77 monthly
France	FF 36.98 hourly	3.60 hourly
Greece	Dr 5,338 daily	17.00 daily
Luxembourg	LF 43,744 monthly	689.73 monthly
Netherlands	Hfl 2,184 monthly	653.15 monthly
Portugal	Esc 52,000 monthly	276.06 monthly
Spain	Pts 64,920 monthly	347.51 monthly
USA	$ 4.25 hourly	2.71 hourly
Japan	[2] Y 554 hourly	1.95 hourly

[1] Wage rates converted to UK equivalent using 1994 purchasing power parities from OECD Main Economic Indicators December 1995.
[2] The lowest regional wage rate.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list all qualitative and quantitative research projects and surveys carried out for her Department into aspects of public attitudes and opinions *(a)* in general and *(b)* in relation to specific policy proposals in each of the past three years to December 1995, indicating for each project or survey (i) the date on which the research was commissioned, (ii) the amount which her Department spent, (iii) who carried out the research, (iv) the number of people surveyed or taking part, (v) the location and the timescale and (vi) which individuals and organisations have been given access to the findings. [5975]

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The Department undertakes a broad programme of research and evaluation including studies to assess the attitudes of parents, clients, employers and others to the

Department's policies and programmes. The details requested are given in the table. Information on the Department's expenditure on projects is not listed as this is, in a number of cases, commercially confidential.

The Department supports the "British Social Attitudes Survey" as part of a consortium of funders. The research is undertaken by Social Community Planning Research, SCPR. The survey covers a sample of 3,600 adults throughout Great Britain and surveys were conducted in 1993, 1994 and 1995. The findings are published by SCPR in November each year. The survey data are also deposited in the Economic and Social Research Council's data archive.

The Employment Service has commissioned a national customer satisfaction survey each year since 1989. The seventh survey was commissioned in May 1995 with a small qualitative study. The main survey was commissioned in July 1995 and fieldwork commenced in November. Since 1993, the survey has been undertaken by Public Attitude Surveys Ltd. The most recent survey included 3,000 claimants and 1,500 non-claimants and covers Great Britain. Reports on all the surveys have been placed in the House of Commons Library and are available to members of the public on request.

Quantitative and qualitative research into individuals' attitudes towards lifetime learning was commissioned in May 1993. The studies were undertaken by Social and Community Planning Research. A total of 71 people took part in the qualitative phase in nine locations: Newcastle, Liverpool, London, Chester, Bedford, Diss (Norfolk), Pegswood (Northumberland), Butley (Suffolk) and Lamport (Northamptonshire). The quantitative survey involved 1,403 people throughout England. The qualitative study was completed in July 1993 and the main survey fieldwork was undertaken in September and October 1993. The results of both studies have been published in the Department's research series and are available to members of the public. Copies have also been placed in the House of Commons Library and with the Employment Select Committee.

A project was commissioned in January 1995 to assess parent's level of knowledge about and attitudes towards education in schools. The project was undertaken by Counterpoint Research. Approximately 120 parents were involved in the survey in eight locations throughout England and Wales: Newcastle, Leeds/Bradford, Bristol, Birmingham, inner London, suburban London, Cardiff and Oakham. The Department has produced a short summary of the main findings and copies have been lodged with the citizens charter unit.

In addition, the Department has commissioned a number of projects to develop and evaluate its publicity campaigns. Since April 1994 a summary of findings from these projects has been made available to interested parties on request. Details of these projects are as listed.

Project:	*Grant-maintained schools*
Purpose:	Assessing parental awareness
Date commissioned:	February 1993
Agency:	Audience selection
Timescale:	Four days
Sample size:	413
Location:	North and South

Project:	*National Curriculum testing of seven, 11 and 14-year-olds*
Purpose:	Evaluation of publicity campaign
Date commissioned:	February 1993
Agency:	British Market Research Bureau
Timescale:	Two months
Sample size:	600
Location:	North, Midlands and South

Project:	*"It's Your Choice" booklet*
Purpose:	Creative development
Date commissioned:	February 1993
Agency:	Diagnostics
Timescale:	One month
Sample size:	Eight group interviews
Location:	North and South

Project:	*Teacher recruitment*
Purpose:	Creative development
Date commissioned:	March 1993
Agency:	Carne Martin
Timescale:	Three months
Sample size:	Ten group interviews
Location:	North, Midlands and South

Project:	*National Curriculum testing of seven, 11 and 14-year-olds*
Purpose:	Creative development
Date commissioned:	March 1993
Agency:	Ted Hudson
Timescale:	One month
Sample size:	Seven group interviews
Location:	Selection of inner city, suburban and shire areas

Project:	*National Curriculum testing of seven, 11 and 14-year-olds*
Purpose:	Assessing parents' views on new arrangements for testing
Date commissioned:	May 1993
Agency:	Bulmershe Research
Timescale:	Four days
Sample size:	1,037
Location:	North, Midlands and South

Project:	*Parent's Charter*
Purpose:	Creative development
Date commissioned:	June 1993
Agency:	Counterpoint
Timescale:	One month
Sample size:	Eight group interviews
Location:	North, Midlands and South

Project:	*Further and Higher Education Charters*
Purpose:	Creative development
Date commissioned:	June 1993
Agency:	Diagnostics
Timescale:	One month
Sample size:	14 groups
Location:	Liverpool, Birmingham, London, Nottingham and Manchester

Project:	*DFE exhibitions—touring roadshow for parents*
Purpose:	Campaign evaluation
Date commissioned:	July 1993
Agency:	Martin Hamblin Research
Timescale:	Two months
Sample size:	605
Location:	At roadshow venues

Project: *Grant-maintained schools*
Purpose: Assessing parental awareness
Date commissioned: July 1993
Agency: Bulmershe Research
Timescale: Two months
Sample size: 200
Location: North, Midlands and South

Project: *School performance tables*
Purpose: Creative development
Date commissioned: July 1993
Agency: Martin Hamblin Research
Timescale: One month
Sample size: 50
Location: North, Midlands and South

Project: *"Your Child's New School" leaflet*
Purpose: Creative development
Date commissioned: August 1993
Agency: Martin Hamblin Research
Timescale: One month
Sample size: 69
Location: Newcastle and Chatham

Project: *Further and Higher Education Charters*
Purpose: Effectiveness evaluation
Date commissioned: September 1993
Agency: Martin Hamblin Research
Timescale: Three months
Sample size: 1,000
Location: North, Midlands and South

Project: *Human resource development exhibition*
Purpose: Evaluation of participation
Date commissioned: October 1993
Agency: Martin Hamblin Research
Timescale: One month
Sample size: 115
Location: At exhibition venue

Project: *Grant-maintained schools*
Purpose: Assessing parental awareness
Date commissioned: November 1993
Agency: Marianne Ridgewell
Timescale: One month
Sample size: S group interviews
Location: North, Midlands and South

Project: *Proposed parental involvement publicity campaign*
Purpose: Creative development
Date commissioned: November 1993
Agency: One World Research
Timescale: One month
Sample size: Three group interviews
Location: London, Birmingham and Manchester

Project: *School performance tables*
Purpose: Evaluation of information in 1993 tables
Date commissioned: January 1994
Agency: Audience Selection/GD Research
Timescale: Two months
Sample size: 600
Location: Islington, Stockport, Peterborough and Birmingham

Project: *National Curriculum Testing of 7, 11 and 14 year olds*
Purpose: Ascertaining current perceptions among teachers
Date commissioned: January 1994
Agency: Audience Selection
Timescale: Two months
Sample size: 500
Location: Islington, Stockport, Peterborough, Birmingham

Project: *National Curriculum Testing of 7, 11 and 14 year olds*
Purpose: Evaluation of 1993 publicity campaign
Date commissioned: January 1994
Agency: British Market Research Bureau
Timescale: Three months
Sample size: 1,000
Location: North, Midlands and South

Project: *Educational Provision for Under 5s*
Purpose: Assessing parental views on provision
Date commissioned: March 1994
Agency: Bulmershe Research
Timescale: Four days
Sample size: 500
Location: North, Midlands and South

Project: *Updated Parent's Charter*
Purpose: Evaluation of publicity campaign
Date commissioned: June 1994
Agency: Research Surveys of Great Britain
Timescale: Three months
Sample size: 2,000
Location: North, Midlands and South

Project: *Schools Update booklet*
Purpose: Evaluation of booklet
Date commissioned: July 1994
Agency: Reflexions
Timescale: One month
Sample size: 400 individuals and six group interviews
Location: North, Midlands and South

Project: *DFE Exhibitions—Touring Roadshow for Parents 1994*
Purpose: Campaign evaluation
Date commissioned: July 1994
Agency: Alpha Research
Timescale: Five weeks
Sample size: 239
Location: Roadshow locations

Project: *Parents' Information Needs*
Purpose: Assessing parents' attitudes to different sources of information on education
Date commissioned: September 1994
Agency: Counterpoint
Timescale: Two months
Sample size: 15 group interviews
Location: North, Midlands and South

Project: *School Performance Tables*
Purpose: Creative development
Date commissioned: September 1994
Agency: GD Research
Timescale: One week
Sample size: 24
Location: Islington, Stockport, Wolverhampton and Capel St. Mary

Project: *School Performance Tables*
Purpose: Publicity campaign evaluation
Date commissioned: November 1994
Agency: Audience Selection
Timescale: Four months
Sample size: 900
Location: North, Midlands and South

Project: *Parents' Information Needs*
Purpose: Assessing parents' attitudes to different sources of information on education
Date commissioned: March 1995
Agency: Research Surveys of Great Britain
Timescale: One month
Sample size: 2,000
Location: North, Midlands and South

Project:	*The role of Skill—National Bureau for Students with Disabilities*
Purpose:	Identifying the information needs of students with disabilities
Date commissioned:	March 1995
Agency:	British Market Research Bureau
Timescale:	One month
Sample size:	2,000
Location:	South East, West Midlands, Devon, Swansea

Project:	*Grant-Maintained Schools*
Purpose:	Evaluation of GM publications
Date commissioned:	April 1995
Agency:	Reflexions
Timescale:	Two months
Sample size:	72
Location:	North, Midlands and South

Project:	*National School Tests*
Purpose:	Evaluation of regional radio publicity
Date commissioned:	May 1995
Agency:	Martin Hamblin Research
Timescale:	Five days
Sample size:	522
Location:	Bristol, Birmingham, Newcastle and Nottingham

Project:	*Parents' Information Needs*
Purpose:	Assessing parents' attitudes to different sources of information
Date commissioned:	October 1995
Agency:	Counterpoint
Timescale:	One month
Sample size:	14 group interviews
Location:	North, Midlands and South

Project:	*School Performance Tables*
Purpose:	Evaluation of information in the 1995 tables
Date commissioned:	October 1995
Agency:	Audience Selection
Timescale:	Two months
Sample size:	900
Location:	North, Midlands and South

Project:	*Nursery Education Vouchers*
Purpose:	Publicity evaluation and planning
Date commissioned:	December 1995
Agency:	British Market Research Bureau
Timescale:	Two months
Sample size:	300
Location:	Wandsworth, Westminster, Kensington and Chelsea

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 16 January 1996

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisoners (Police Cells)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the daily cost charged by each police authority for the use of police cells to house overspill prisoners; and if he will make a statement. [8758]

Mr. Maclean: No Prison Service prisoners have been held in police cells since June 1995. At that time, the national average cost per prisoner was £300 per night.

Police authorities do not have a standard cost for holding prisoners. Each authority submits an invoice to the Prison Service based on the actual cost of the service provided. There are many variables which may affect that cost.

Home Office circular 36/1993 gives guidance to police authorities on calculating their costs. The Home Office also monitors the charges made by police forces.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convicted criminals were being held in police station cells at the latest available date; and if he will make a statement. [8759]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 16 January 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of convicted criminals being held in police station cells at the latest available date.

There have been no Prison Service prisoners held in police cells since 15 June 1995.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total number of port applicants for asylum arriving in the United Kingdom having travelling through one or more other countries in each of the last three years; and what proportion of all port applicants they were. [9621]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers reside in the parliamentary constituency of Tottenham; and how many of them have been granted *(a)* refugee status and *(b)* exceptional leave to remain in the last five years. [9811]

Mr. Kirkhope: Information on the places of residence of people currently seeking asylum is not held centrally.

Terrorism Legislation (Inquiry)

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the methods by which the right hon. Lord Lloyd of Berwick will gather evidence for his inquiry into the future requirement for legislation against terrorism. [10179]

Mr. Howard: Advertisements are being placed in the press inviting people to submit views to Lord Lloyd by 15 March. Lord Lloyd is writing, with the same invitation, to a wide range of interested parties throughout the United Kingdom. He will, in the course of his review, seek to elicit the widest possible range of fact and opinion.

Any person wishing to offer his views on the law against terrorism should write to Lord Lloyd at the following address:

PO Box 9998

London SW1H 9ZB.

Police (Complaints)

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many public complaints against each police force in England and Wales were made in 1994; and what percentage change this represents over the figure for 1993. [9204]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 15 January 1995]:* The information requested is given in the table.

Total complaints recorded 1994
Police forces in England and Wales

	Total complaints recorded 1994	*Percentage change 1993–1994*
Avon and Somerset	992	5
Bedfordshire	249	–2
Cambridgeshire	422	38
Cheshire	454	–10
Cleveland	460	–14
Cumbria	319	–4
Derbyshire	481	20
Devon and Cornwall	935	22
Dorset	147	–18
Durham	214	5
Essex	500	22
Gloucestershire	300	–19
Greater Manchester	2,701	5
Hampshire	685	–20
Hertfordshire	407	–3
Humberside	472	–28
Kent	766	–7
Lancashire	695	9
Leicestershire	305	–19
Lincolnshire	93	12
City of London	89	65
Merseyside	2,146	18
Metropolitan Police[1]	10,094	na
Norfolk	393	2
Northamptonshire	178	–11
Northumbria	612	–6
North Yorkshire	330	–5
Nottinghamshire	788	17
South Yorkshire	583	–11
Staffordshire	548	1
Suffolk	353	1
Surrey	506	25
Sussex	905	28
Thames Valley	979	11
Warwickshire	136	–17

Total complaints recorded 1994
Police forces in England and Wales

	Total complaints recorded 1994	*Percentage change 1993–1994*
West Mercia	506	11
West Midlands	1,739	5
West Yorkshire	1,304	3
Wiltshire	260	-6
Dyfed-Powys	169	19
Gwent	467	16
North Wales	608	32
South Wales	981	16
Total	36,201	[2]5

[1] Comparable figures for 1993 not available.
[2] Excludes Metropolitan Police.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the level of recorded crime in the Merseyside police force area *(a)* in June 1994 and *(b)* in June 1995; and what are the figures for England and Wales over the same period. [7925]

Mr. Maclean: There were 11,122 offences recorded by the Merseyside police in June 1994 and 12,207 in June 1995. The corresponding figures for England and Wales were 440,245 and 405,035 respectively.

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the change in figures for reported robbery in London in the 12 months to June 1995. [8100]

Mr. Maclean: The available information relates to offences of robbery recorded in the Metropolitan police district. There were 27,712 offences recorded in the 12 months to June 1995, an increase of 10 per cent. over the previous 12 months.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the change in the level of recorded crime in the Humberside police force region since 1987. [8156]

Mr. Maclean: Between 1987 and 1994, recorded crime in Humberside rose by 53 per cent. from 88,570 offences to 135,826 offences.

Executive Agencies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if answers sent to hon. Members in reply to parliamentary questions by the head of executive agencies in his Department are *(a)* seen, *(b)* approved and *(c)* amended by him before they are sent; and if he will identify such letters to which amendments by him have been made in 1994–95. [7830]

Mr. Howard: Parliamentary questions are passed to the head of an executive agency when the matter is one delegated to him or her under the agency framework document. It is the usual practice in the Home Office for Ministers to see the proposed replies to such parliamentary questions before they appear in the *Official Report*, but they would not normally intervene in operational matters. No central record is kept of replies amended at the request of Ministers and this information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Private Security Firms

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to ensure adequate legal control over private security forces operating in local communities; and if he will make a statement. [9134]

Mr. Maclean: We are currently reviewing the case for statutory regulation of the private security industry.

Immigration Applications

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many cases in each of the last five years an application for renewal of exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom has been refused; and how many of these refusals were after *(a)* one year's exceptional leave and *(b)* four years' exceptional leave. [8977]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is not held centrally.

Prisoners (Police Interviews)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the guidelines for the conduct of police interviews with convicted prisoners in the furtherance of their investigations into other crimes; what is the legal status of such guidelines; how long they have been in force; and what changes have occurred to previous practices since 1966. [8720]

Mr. Maclean: Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary issued guidance to the police in January 1987 on the interviewing of convicted prisoners about outstanding crime. The guidance, copies of which are available in the Library, is non-statutory but Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary monitors forces' compliance as part of its inspection procedure.

Child Sexual Abuse

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders convicted of child sexual abuse in each of the last five years had previous convictions for the same offence. [8717]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not available.

Police (Driver Training)

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total amount spent on driver training in each police force area in England and Wales for each year since 1990. [7541]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 15 January 1996]*: Information collected centrally relates to all aspects of driver and traffic training. Details of the number of days spent on such training are set out in the table, together with information about training costs, which is not complete.

Total training days—driver and traffic training

Force	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*
Avon and Somerset	6,710	6,736	6,829
Bedfordshire	2,562	2,414	2,555
Cambridgeshire	587	1,074	2,053
Cheshire	3,547	1,843	1,429
City of London	952	697	706
Cleveland	2,259	743	618
Cumbria	1,496	1,383	1,416
Derbyshire	4,511	2,287	2,795
Devon and Cornwall	3,652	4,254	3,648
Dorset	1,524	1,804	1,603
Durham	2,135	2,643	2,136
Dyfed Powys	1,614	1,397	1,746
Essex	6,535	7,813	7,840
Gloucestershire	1,762	1,465	1,282
Greater Manchester	12,431	10,345	9,062
Gwent	1,513	1,291	—
Hampshire	3,944	3,407	—
Hertfordshire	3,698	2,160	3,260
Humberside	2,490	3,158	—
Kent	4,620	2,643	3,008
Lancashire	2,675	3,321	3,003
Leicestershire	2,270	3,011	2,521
Lincolnshire	1,617	1,675	1,562
Merseyside	5,504	6,608	3,601
Norfolk	2,652	2,406	1,887
Northamptonshire	2,466	2,389	2,130
Northumbria	5,178	4,410	4,535
North Wales	1,351	1,325	1,101
North Yorkshire	2,345	2,944	2,754
Nottinghamshire	4,030	3,151	2,477
South Wales	2,490	4,341	4,982
South Yorkshire	3,756	3,570	4,396
Staffordshire	4,677	4,982	3,936
Suffolk	1,715	2,115	1,916
Surrey	2,889	3,674	—
Sussex	4,465	6,843	—
Thames Valley	7,948	7,427	5,585
Warwickshire	1,153	1,678	969
West Mercia	2,236	3,375	4,014
West Midlands	13,016	9,980	10,777
West Yorkshire	4,532	4,304	4,920
Wiltshire	2,771	3,332	2,638
Metropolitan	28,149	31,783	33,886

Training costs—driver and traffic training (£s)

Force	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*
Avon and Somerset	1,494,009	1,321,638	1,453,522
Bedfordshire	—	590,523	677,496
Cambridgeshire	—	361,942	524,857
Cheshire	509,266	376,253	330,990
City of London	—	—	—
Cleveland	467,000	273,000	—
Cumbria	305,436	135,649	259,091
Derbyshire	929,463	—	577,794
Devon and Cornwall	655,897	855,765	877,513
Dorset	—	419,892	—
Durham	—	—	—
Dyfed Powys	263,400	231,600	277,251
Essex	1,964,589	2,300,000	2,007,391
Gloucestershire	350,784	293,538	276,670
Greater Manchester	—	1,251,773	1,207,188
Gwent	287,498	209,866	98,258
Hampshire	—	858,621	1,114,196
Hertfordshire	—	—	—
Humberside	520,000	258,000	—
Kent	1,048,039	875,336	1,185,687
Lancashire	—	914,666	—
Leicestershire	253,713	—	405,623
Lincolnshire	—	474,400	—

Training costs—driver and traffic training (£s)

Force	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*
Merseyside	1,594,039	1,827,821	1,413,639
Norfolk	571,500	519,700	453,800
Northamptonshire	—	441,661	431,128
Northumbria	—	—	968,752
North Wales	—	—	121,569
North Yorkshire	433,570	533,890	550,200
Nottinghamshire	—	710,292	—
South Wales	644,808	840,145	961,465
South Yorkshire	—	—	—
Staffordshire	441,759	1,137,897	535,668
Suffolk	553,462	448	456,012
Surrey	864,700	969,000	1,002,000
Sussex	503,000	805,912	—
Thames Valley	—	1,761,828	1,380,992
Warwickshire	166,314	788,718	249,693
West Mercia	596,616	725,905	897,038
West Midlands	3,020,332	3,226,004	2,989,280
West Yorkshire	1,674,900	1,493,900	1,561,300
Wiltshire	47,620	303,448	392,890
Metropolitan	—	4,546,817	—

Figures for 1993–94 and 1994–95 are not yet available.

Nigeria

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those members of the Nigerian Government who are prohibited from entry to the United Kingdom. [8537]

Mr. Hanley: I have been asked to reply.

In accordance with the common position adopted by the European Union on 4 December, all members of the Federal Executive Council, the provisional Ruling Council, serving members of the military and security forces, and their families shall be refused entry to the United Kingdom.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Delegated Legislation

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many of the powers to make statutory instruments exercisable by the Lord Chancellor under primary legislation enacted since 1979 are subject to *(a)* the negative and *(b)* the affirmative resolution procedure. [9587]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Law of Domicile (Reform)

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department whether the Government intend to bring forward legislation to give effect to the reforms of the law of domicile recommended by the Law Commission in its recent report on this subject (Law Com. No. 168, Scot Law Com. No. 107). [10169]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Government have decided not to take forward these reforms on the basis that, although they are desirable in themselves, they do not contain sufficient practical benefits to outweigh the risks of proceeding with them and to justify disturbing the present long-established body of case law on this subject.

Mental Incapacity (Law Commission Report)

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what response the Government intend to make to the Law Commission report on mental incapacity (Law Com. No. 231). [10170]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Government have considered the Law Commission report on mental incapacity very carefully and are grateful to the many individuals and organisations that have sent in their views on this subject. The Government appreciate that this is an important and sensitive subject raising moral and ethical issues on which many people will have strong personal views.

The Government have decided not to legislate on the basis of the Law Commission's proposals in their current form and have also concluded that it would be inappropriate to make any proposals to Parliament in the absence of full public consultation. The Government propose to issue a consultation paper on mental incapacity in due course.

The Government wish to emphasise that they fully support the views of the House of Lords Select Committee on Medical Ethics that euthanasia is unacceptable and have no plans to change this policy. The Government's consultation will thus not include any proposals on this subject.

ENVIRONMENT

Ruddy Duck

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the current situation in respect of the ruddy duck; and if he will make a statement. [8457]

Mr. Clappison: We are currently considering the views of the United Kingdom ruddy duck working group and our statutory scientific advisers, English Nature, in developing an appropriate strategy for controlling population levels of this introduced species.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each of his executive agencies for each financial year for the last four years *(a)* their budget for overseas travel and *(b)* the actual amount spent. [8710]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Secretary of State has responsibility for four executive agencies—Building Research Establishment, Ordnance Survey, Planning Inspectorate and the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre.

The information requested for OS, PINS and QEII is set out in the table.

£ thousand

	1992–93		*1993–94*		*1994–95*		*1995–96*	
Agency	*Budget*	*Actual*	*Budget*	*Actual*	*Budget*	*Actual*	*Budget*	*Actual*
PINS	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.5	0.0	2.4	0.0	2.2
OS	64.0	63.0	72.0	99.0	75.0	68.0	60.0	64.0
QEII	61.2	45.7	59.0	81.8	50.0	45.1	33.7	32.7

1. PINS does not have a specific budget for overseas travel.
2. 1995–96 figures are up to December 1995.

BRE does not set a budget for overseas travel. The agency is funded through commissions undertaken for its various customers. When these include overseas travel, the cost is recharged directly to customers. The agency does not distinguish in its financial systems between travel within the UK and overseas travel; to provide the information requested could be done only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action heads of his Department's executive agencies are taking to safeguard the provision of pre-retirement courses; and if he will make a statement. [9147]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Secretary of State has responsibility for four executive agencies—Building Research Establishment, Ordnance Survey, Planning Inspectorate and the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre. The agencies, which have delegated responsibility for these matters, arrange pre-retirement courses as required. No special action has been taken, or is needed, to safeguard their provision; there is no intention to cease providing such courses.

Fifth Terminal, Heathrow Airport

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to receive the report of the inquiry into the possible fifth air terminal at Heathrow airport; and if he will make a statement. [8552]

Sir Paul Beresford: The public inquiry into the proposed fifth terminal at Heathrow airport is currently scheduled to finish in spring 1997, after which the inspector will prepare his report on the applications before the inquiry. It is too early to say when the report will be received.

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping, (London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research has been commissioned by his Department on the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women,

over the age of 60 years, who are homeless and sleeping rough within the Greater London area; and if he will make a statement. [8553]

Mr. Clappison: Information about the extent of rough sleeping is mostly anecdotal or estimated, except for central London, where voluntary sector agencies carry out a twice-yearly count of rough sleepers. The methodology for this arose from an independent evaluation of the rough sleepers initiative, commissioned by my Department. The most recent count, in November 1995, found 272 people sleeping rough in central London, of whom 25 men and seven women were aged 60 years or more.

The Government are considering assisting the development of the successful rough sleepers initiative model in areas outside central London where rough sleeping can be demonstrated to be a major problem. A Government consultation paper about the future of the initiative, issued on 3 October, invited local authorities to quantify the extent of rough sleeping in their areas. The responses are now being analysed.

Water Metering

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will instruct all water companies to stop further implementation of metering water supplies to individual residences, unless specifically asked to by the occupier; and if he will make a statement. [9116]

Mr. Clappison: Neither the Director General of Water Services, Mr. Ian Byatt, nor Ministers have powers to prescribe charging methods or types of tariff. Within the terms of the legislation, it is up to each company to decide which method of charging is most appropriate and cost-effective in its area, subject to the Director General of Water Services being satisfied that the chosen method and the associated tariffs do not give undue preference to, or unduly discriminate against, any group or class of customers.

Pollution Information (Internet)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to publish pollution information on the Internet. [8635]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Department has pages on the CCTA's world wide web site known as hhtp://www.open.go.uk. Currently, the DOE pages include information on the Department's responsibilities for air quality and drinking water, plus the departmental press notices. The Department's air quality information and press notices are updated on a daily basis.

The Department will also be putting a selection of information from its digest of environmental statistics publication on the CCTA's world wide web site later this year.

Planning Applications

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the average time taken by his Department to decide planning applications which it has called in; [9507]

(2) what targets he has set on the length of time taken to determine planning applications which have been called in by his Department; [9508]

(3) how many planning applications have been called in by his Department in each of the last five years. [9506]

Sir Paul Beresford: The number of planning applications which have been called in from English local planning authorities over the past five years have been:

1990–91: 132

1991–92: 140

1992–93: 101

1993–94: 99

1994–95: 167.

These called-in cases should be seen in the context of nearly half a million planning applications made each year.

The Secretary of State does not set overall targets for the determination of called-in applications. These cases are normally discussed at a public inquiry, whose length will depend upon the complexity of the issues and the amount of public interest generated; but the Department does aim to determine 80 per cent. of called-in planning applications within 13 weeks of receipt of the inspector's report and to have determined all cases within 20 weeks of receipt of the report.

There is no centrally available information on the average length of time taken to determine all called-in planning applications.

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance he intends to issue to *(a)* Departments, *(b)* executive agencies, *(c)* non-departmental public bodies and *(d)* outside bodies and arm's-length organisations which he has responsibility for, or an interest in, regarding the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if he will make a statement. [9223]

Sir Paul Beresford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People on Monday 15 January 1996 *Official Report*, column *417*. I will ensure that my Department and any bodies for which it is responsible will be made aware of their responsibilities under the Act.

Building Regulations

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) when his Department will complete its analysis of the responses to consultations over the extension of part M of the Building Regulations to residential dwellings; [9261]

(2) if he will be seeking advice from the Building Regulations Advisory Committee regarding the extension of part M of the Building Regulations to residential dwellings; and when he intends to do so; [9262]

(3) when he intends to make a statement regarding the extension of part M of the Building Regulations to residential dwellings. [9263]

Mr. Clappison: The analysis of the responses to the Government's consultation on extending part M of the Building Regulations to cover new dwellings is expected to be completed this spring. This will then be considered by the Building Regulations Advisory Committee with the aim of advising me of the best way forward. After considering that advice, I shall make a statement.

Rural Challenge (Easington Colliery)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Easington dated 28 November 1995 concerning the failed bid for rural challenge for Easington colliery. [9671]

Mr. Clappison: I replied to the hon. Member's letter yesterday—Monday 15 January 1996.

Local Authority Debt

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the debt level of each local authority in England indicating in each case the debt per head of population. [9807]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have today placed the information requested in the Library of the House.

Standard Spending Assessment (Gosport)

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take any necessary steps to ensure that the payments made to the borough of Gosport are correctly calculated on the basis of the appropriate standard spending assessment with particular reference to taking account of an accurate assessment of the number of armed forces residents. [9806]

Sir Paul Beresford: We are currently considering all the representations made by authorities on our proposals for the 1996–97 settlement, including those made by the borough council of Gosport on the resident population figures which it is proposed to use to calculate standard spending assessments. We are proposing to use figures of resident population at 30 June 1994, as estimated by the Registrar General. They will take account of representations made to us during the consultation period.

Special Areas of Conservation

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the areas in the United Kingdom which he has designated special areas of conservation; and if he will place maps of these areas in the Library. [9616]

Mr. Clappison: I refer the hon. Member to the answers given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) on 20 June 1995, *Official Report*, columns *140–43*, and my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) on 9 January 1996, *Official Report*, columns *6–8*, for lists of the 211 sites in the United Kingdom which have been forwarded to the European Commission as candidate special areas of conservation. Maps of these areas were placed on deposit in the Library last March at the commencement of the public consultation on these areas.

Radon

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further action he proposes to take on radon in homes; and if he will make a statement. [10247]

Mr. Clappison: Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that can accumulate in homes and increase the risk of lung cancer.

My Department has had a long-established programme to identify those most at risk, and to advise them on what action to take in order to protect their health. In England, 250,000 homes have had their radon levels measured under the Government-funded measurement scheme; cost-effective methods of preventing radon from entering new and existing homes have been developed by the Building Research Establishment; changes have been made to the building regulations to prevent radon becoming a problem in new homes; and financial assistance is available to enable the most needy householders to take remedial action.

The next phase of the radon programme will take place in early February, when 200,000 invitations to have a free radon measurement will be sent to those householders in Devon, Cornwall, Somerset, Northamptonshire and Derbyshire most likely to have high radon levels in their homes. All householders in these counties have, over the past eight years, been offered free measurements. The results obtained so far have enabled the National Radiological Protection Board to identify with far greater precision the areas within those counties where homes are most likely to have high radon levels. This allows measurement invitations to be targeted more accurately and efficiently. The offer of free measurements will therefore now be based on invitations to individual householders, and the current arrangements for free measurement will be discontinued from 29 February.

The NRPB is currently completing a mapping exercise of the whole of England. This will be published later in the year and will indicate more precisely than before those areas with high radon levels.

Radon is a serious problem, but one that is amenable to simple, relatively inexpensive solutions, developed primarily by the Department's Building Research Establishment. We shall continue to advise householders in high radon areas what action they should take. Local authorities have discretion to give grants to low-income private owners for radon remedial works.

Fire Protection

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the effectiveness of sprinklers and other fire protection measures in (i) hospitals and (ii) homes for the elderly. [9478]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* My Department has commissioned a number of studies from the Building Research Establishment on sprinklers and other fire protection measures in connection with hospitals and residential care establishments, including old people's homes. Reports are evaluated by my officials, who make recommendations to Ministers on the work's significance and any practical implications, for example for building regulations, flowing from it.

I am sending the hon. Gentleman a list of these studies, some of which have been published.

PRIME MINISTER

Honours List

Dr. Wright: To ask the Prime Minister how many Conservative hon. Members have received knighthoods since 1979; and if he will list them by name. [9666]

The Prime Minister: A total of 127 Conservative Members have received knighthoods since 1979. The names of the recipients have been published in the *London Gazette.*

Dr. Wright: To ask the Prime Minister if he will define "political services" and "public and political services" in the context of the honours list. [9607]

The Prime Minister: Political services relate to those who give service to a political party. Political and public service is an appropriate description for those who have some other form of public service to their credit in addition to their political work.

Government Economic Policy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the goal of the Government's economic policy. [9794]

The Prime Minister: The Government's overall economic objective is to promote sustained economic growth and rising prosperity. We will continue with the policies which have given this country the lowest mortgage rates for 30 years, the lowest basic rate of tax for over 50 years and the longest period of low inflation for 50 years.

Refugees

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Prime Minister if he will initiate joint action by the relevant Departments of Her Majesty's Government to determine the domicile of those persons, and their dependants, who *(a)* have refugee status, *(b)* have been given exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom or *(c)* have outstanding applications for refugee status; and if he will (i) publish and (ii) place in the Library the numbers of (1) such persons and (2) their dependants (x) by local authority area and (y) by parliamentary constituency. [8251]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Prime Minister what legal costs arising from the Scott inquiry have been incurred by the Government in relation to *(a)* himself, *(b)* his predecessor and *(c)* his or her officials and advisers. [8743]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* The Treasury Solicitor provides legal advice to the Prime Minister and his officials on a range of issues as part of his normal duties. The cost of his advice in relation to the Scott inquiry is not quantifiable. No other legal costs have been incurred in connection with the Scott inquiry on behalf of myself, my predecessor or my officials or advisers.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Science Budget

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the allocation of the science budget. [10078]

Mr. Lang: I have discussed the allocations with the Director General of Research Councils and have decided that, subject to parliamentary approval of the Supply estimates in due course, the science budget of £1,312.390 million should be allocated as follows:

Science Budget Allocations and Planning Assumptions

£ million

	Allocation	*Planning figures*	
	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
BBSRC	176.31	176.89	179.98
ESRC	63.08	63.62	65.64
EPSRC	375.95	373.46	376.78
MRC	281.89	282.96	286.86
NERC	164.65	162.32	167.90
PPARC	191.68	191.73	194.90
International subscriptions reserve	15.04	18.00	18.00
CCLRC	1.45	1.45	1.45
Research Council Pensions Supplement	9.87	11.53	12.97
Royal Society	21.82	22.27	22.62
Royal Academy of Engineering	3.12	3.37	3.44
OST Initiatives	2.53	2.78	2.85
Foresight Challenge	5.00	10.00	13.00
High-performance computing	—	10.00	—
Total	1,312.39	1,330.39	1,346.39

These allocations will enable the research councils and other funded bodies to consolidate and develop the new initiatives announced in February 1994 to take forward the policies set out in the 1993 White Paper "Realising Our Potential: A Strategy for Science, Engineering and Technology". Further details are set out in the paper "Allocation of the Science Budget 1996–97", which I have placed in the Library of the House.

National Weights and Measures Laboratory

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the forthcoming prior options study of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory. [10079]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Government announced on 29 September 1995 that all public sector research establishments would be subject to prior options reviews.

A review of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory has begun. Bearing in mind the extensive studies carried out leading to the decision in 1994 that NWML should remain an executive agency of the DTI, and my right hon. Friend's recently announced decision that it should move to a net expenditure control basis from 1 April 1996, the forthcoming review is likely to draw extensively on this material; the review will also consider NWML's relationship with public sector research establishments.

I should welcome comments from interested parties. Comments should be sent by 16 February 1996 to Charles Cruickshank, Department of Trade and Industry, 151 Buckingham Palace road, London SW1W 9SS.

Trade Unions

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much the Government have paid to trade unions towards the costs of conducting postal ballots under legislation in each year since their introduction. [9812]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The costs of the trade union ballot refunds for the scheme, by calendar year since its inception, are as follows:

1980: No applications
1981: £12,935
1982: £26,149
1983: £85,072
1984: £72,498
1985: £1,392,982
1986: £738,301
1987: £1,158,801
1988: £869,448
1989: £1,339,582
1990: £2,636,766
1991: £4,082,383
1992: £4,259,860
1993: £3,382,803
1994: £1,899,955
1995: £1,095,236.

Carbon Monoxide Detectors

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had, and when, with the Building Standards Institute on immediately establishing a British standard for carbon monoxide detectors. [9617]

Mr. John M. Taylor: An official from my Department sits in the relevant British Standards Institution group which has been writing a new standard for carbon monoxide detectors and has been actively involved in this work. I am pleased to say the standard has now been completed and is expected to be published in the spring.

Non-fossil Fuel Renewable Order 4

Ms Ruddock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) how NFFO 4—fourth non-fossil fuel renewable order—was modified by the results of any environmental appraisal undertaken by his Department; [8664]

(2) if NFFO 4 has been subject to an environmental appraisal using the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment"; and if he will publish the appraisal; [8662]

(3) what procedures have been put in place by his Department to monitor the environmental impacts arising from the implementation of NFFO 4; [8665]

(4) what alternative courses of action from those detailed in NFFO 4 were considered in any environmental appraisal undertaken by his Department. [8663]

Mr. Page *[holding answers 15 January 1996]:* One of the objectives underlying the Government's renewables policy, including the non-fossil fuel obligation in respect of renewables, is a reduction in the emission of pollutants. The environmental aspects of the policy were fully discussed in the White Paper "This Common Inheritance" (Cm 1200, 1990), and in DTI energy papers such as "New and Renewable Energy: Future Prospects in the UK" (DTI: Energy Paper Number 62, 1994). The environmental aspects of particular proposed power stations are handled through the planning process.

TRANSPORT

Marine Safety Agency

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to delegate further work from the Marine Safety Agency to the private sector; and if he will make a statement. [8229]

Mr. Norris: The only delegation to the private sector of the work of the Marine Safety Agency currently planned, and which is in addition to the delegation package announced in August 1993, is the eyesight testing of seafarers.

Motorway Service Areas

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for what reasons leaseholding operators of motorway service areas are not required to pay annual rent to his Department. [9397]

Mr. Watts: Originally, operators of motorway service areas paid an annual rent based on turnover. In 1978 the Prior committee report on MSAs concluded that this arrangement was discouraging new investment and the improvement of standards. A new policy was announced in October 1979 under which operators would pay a lump sum at the beginning of their lease term and a peppercorn annual rent thereafter. That arrangement had been adopted for all MSAs, new and existing, by 1982. It continues to apply to the 19 existing MSAs for which the Department currently owns the freehold, pending their sale to the private sector. The provision of MSAs was deregulated in 1992 and the issue of payment of rent to my Department no longer arises with new MSAs.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the costs to his Department of acting as a freeholder for motorway service areas in England. [9398]

Mr. Watts: The costs are minimal and will reduce to nothing as the Department's remaining freehold interests in motorway service areas in England are sold to the private sector.

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance he intends to issue to *(a)* Departments, *(b)* executive agencies, *(c)* non-departmental public bodies and *(d)* outside bodies and arm's-length organisations which he has responsibility for, or an interest in, regarding the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if he will make a statement. [9226]

Mr. Norris: We will shortly be publishing the first in a series of information bulletins which will report the progress we are making in implementing part V of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. These bulletins will be widely circulated. As the bulletins are published, I will arrange for copies to be placed in the Library.

When regulations are made under part V of the Act, we will issue separate detailed guidance to all those affected.

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent reports he has received in respect of safety failings on the west coast main line; and if he will make a statement. [9291]

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend has received no general reports indicating safety failings on the west coast main line. The Health and Safety Executive has received specific reports on derailments at Camden on 14 December and Euston station on 20 December 1995. These incidents are being investigated by the Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate. The inspectorate is also following up a number of claims about the condition of the west coast main line made by individuals.

HM railway inspectorate will continue its independent monitoring and investigation of railway safety to ensure that safety standards are maintained on the west coast main line.

Franchising Director

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to revise the objectives, instructions and guidance issued to the franchising director under section 5 of the Railways Act 1993. [10257]

Sir George Young: I have now written to the franchising director clarifying and amplifying the sections of his objectives, instructions and guidance which relate to the setting of passenger service requirements and the evaluation of bids. I have placed a copy of my letter in the Library.

Newbury Bypass

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessment has been made of the impact of the Newbury bypass on habitats of protected species; [8410]

(2) what are the comparative costs of construction in respect of *(a)* the Newbury bypass and *(b)* upgrading the existing route of the A34 in accordance with route option CA4; and what assessment has been made of the relative environmental impact of each option. [8409]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Andrew Smith, dated 16 January 1996:

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. John Watts, has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Questions about the A34 Newbury Bypass.

We have surveyed carefully the route of the Bypass and we have relocated (in close liaison with English Nature) protected species where necessary. For example, all major trees were surveyed for the presence of bats; those found were caught, their roots removed and the bats then released into woodland away from the route, where bat boxes had been erected. Badgers have been relocated to new artificial setts and dormice have been moved to new sites. Our ecological consultants will keep watch during the works to ensure the safety of protected species in liaison, as necessary, with English Nature.

Route option CA4 was an objectors alternative route put forward at the 1988 Public Inquiry; the comparative costs of the two schemes are those given to that Inquiry. These are £38.8M for route option CA4 and £46.6M for the western bypass. I should add that the Inspector at that Inquiry concluded that route CA4 would be ineffective in traffic terms and that the proposed western route would be very much better value for money that any of the alternatives put forward to the Inquiry.

The comparative environmental impacts of the proposed route and alternative CA4 were discussed at the Public Inquiry in 1988. The Inspector concluded that central route options would not relieve Newbury of significant amounts of through traffic; there would be upheaval and disruption during construction and serious problems would remain at junctions. He found that CA4 in particular would have severe and insurmountable operational difficulties. And, at the end, central routes would leave Newbury with structures out of keeping with a country market town and there would be higher levels of pollution. The Inspector found all central routes unacceptable and the Secretaries of State accepted that.

Our Study Report last year looked again among other issues at central route options, but concluded that nothing had changed since 1988 which had made the Inspector's criticism less valid or which had altered the balance he had found in favour of the western bypass.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the compulsory purchase order was made to acquire land on which the Newbury bypass is to be built; and when compensation will start being paid to those affected by the order. [9522]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Stephen Byers, dated 16 January 1996:

As you know, John Watts has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the Newbury Bypass.

The Compulsory Purchase Order for the scheme was made on 4 October 1993. Some compensation has already been paid, further payments will follow when negotiations with landowners are finalised.

Channel Tunnel Security Seal

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the safety of the security bolt seal chosen by Railfreight for channel tunnel operations relative to that of its competitors. [8486]

Mr. Watts: The bolt seal meets the requirement laid down by the Department that any seal used must be on the Custom and Excise group 1 or 2 list. Railfreight Distribution has asked the Loss Prevention Council to undertake independent tests on the seal in the light of allegations made about it.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if Railfreight is required to operate in an open-market, competitive manner in its allocation of contracts. [8487]

Mr. Watts: As with other public bodies, Railfreight Distribution must operate openly in a competitive market. EC rules require large contracts to be advertised in the *Official Journal* of the EU and to be available to bidders throughout the EC. I am advised that Railfreight Distribution selected the bolt seal in 1994 following the evaluation of a number of seals. In EC and Railfreight Distribution procurement terms this was a small contract. However, Railfreight Distribution has agreed that the next contract will be put out for full competitive tender.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what considerations led Railfreight to require all users of the channel tunnel to use the same security bolt seal; and what are his powers in this respect. [8488]

Mr. Watts: This is entirely a management matter for the British Railways Board and Railfreight Distribution. I understand from the BR Board that for managerial and control purposes Railfreight Distribution needed a single, easily recognisable set of seals to permit rapid verification of the integrity of cargoes at depots in all weathers. It concluded that acceptance of more than one manufacturer's product could result in a multiplicity of seals which in Railfreight Distribution's view would have impeded the safe and efficient discharge of its responsibilities. The BR Board has reviewed this decision and agreed that this was correct in the circumstances.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration his safety inspectorate has given to the security seal policy of Railfreight; and what is its judgment thereon. [8489]

Mr. Watts: Security matters are the responsibility of my Department's transport security division. Its inspectors routinely consider all aspects of channel tunnel security. They do not consider that there are any security problems with the seal system in use by Railfreight Distribution.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has met representatives of the British security seal industry about Railfreight's policy on security seals for the channel tunnel; and if he will make a statement. [8490]

Mr. Watts: I have had one meeting with Mr. Bill Tait, the former chairman of the Security Seal Industry Association, and I have been in correspondence with the current chairman, Mr. Ken Lloyd. The policy on the use and control of seals is for Railfreight Distribution to determine. The Department's role is to lay down the standard of seal required.

London Airports (Access)

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to allow formal local government membership of his London airports surface access study steering group. [8532]

Mr. Norris: To keep it at a manageable size, the membership of the steering group for the London airports surface access study is restricted to representatives from several Government Departments and from transport and airport operators.

During the study, advice and information is being sought from other interested parties, including local authorities and local authority groups, such as the South and West London Transport Conference— Sweltrac—of which Spelthorne borough council is a member.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what development opportunities and possible new routes have been discussed by his London airports surface access study steering group. [8533]

Mr. Norris: The London airports surface access study is examining the opportunities for improving surface access to and between London's main airports—Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted, Luton and London City airports. As well as considering new links and development opportunities, the study will assess the extent to which such improvements would relieve future congestion on road links to the airports. The LASAS consultants are reviewing a wide range of proposals and schemes and are due to report by the end of June.

Cars (Environmental Pollution)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he proposes to introduce to *(a)* discourage the use of the car and *(b)* encourage the use of alternative forms of transport. [8600]

Mr. Norris: Measures to discourage the use of the car and encourage alternatives are being promoted by local authorities within the context of the package approach. The need for further measures has been discussed widely as part of the national debate on transport policy, on which the Government intend to produce a further report.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action his Department is currently taking to increase the amount of public information available in respect of the environmental effects of car pollution. [8603]

Mr. Norris: My Department regularly issues advice in official publications to motorists and operators on environmentally conscious driving and, in conjunction with the Department of Environment, is undertaking a number of initiatives to increase the amount of public information available.

One recent initiative, under the aegis of the Greener Motoring Forum, was the launch of a pilot information campaign, with garages and dealerships in five cities. This offered motorists a free exhaust emissions test and a booklet, "Running a greener car," explaining what they can do to improve their car's environmental performance.

More generally, the first national air quality strategy, which the Government intend to publish for consultation within the next few months, will include a detailed breakdown of the source of many common air pollutants, including road transport where appropriate, and the steps which we will take or expect others to take to reach air quality standards and objectives. The Government also publish the "Digest of Environmental Statistics" and sponsor publications such as the independent reports of the expert panel on air quality standards, which spell out clearly the environmental effects of different sources of pollution, including cars.

Rural Transport Services

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many rural bus routes have been *(a)* withdrawn and *(b)* curtailed since 1979. [8602]

Mr. Norris: The Traffic Commissioners' records of bus service registrations, variations and withdrawals do not differentiate between rural and urban routes, and so the information requested cannot be provided. The annual report of the Traffic Commissioners shows the total numbers of services withdrawn or varied for each traffic area.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many rural train stations have closed since 1979. [8601]

Mr. Watts: Twenty stations in rural locations have been closed since 1979.

Research Costs

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of his Department's transport research budget is devoted to investigating transport by *(a)* rail and *(b)* road; and what sums his Department has spent on these areas in the last year for which figures are available. [8604]

Mr. Watts: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 9 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *49*. It is primarily for the rail industry to commission research particular to its needs. In 1994–95 my Department spent £69,000 on research devoted to investigating transport by rail and £33,800,000 on research devoted to investigating transport by road.

National Integrated Transport Strategy

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to advance a national integrated transport strategy. [8605]

Mr. Norris: Decisions on the future direction of transport policy will be taken in the light of the national transport debate.

Delegated Legislation

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many of the powers to make statutory instruments exercisable by the Secretary of State under primary legislation enacted since 1979 are subject to *(a)* the negative and *(b)* the affirmative resolution procedure. [9589]

Mr. Norris: Records of the powers and the parliamentary procedures specified in relation to them are not kept and the information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions in the past five years the holder of his office has travelled overseas at public expense without being accompanied by civil servants. [9813]

Sir George Young: None.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the environmental organisations he has met over the past year to discuss transport issues. [8599]

Sir George Young: Since taking up my position in July, I have had meetings with a number of environmental organisations, including:

The Cyclists Public Affairs Group

English Heritage

English Nature

The Environmental Transport Association

The National Trust

The Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

Transport 2000.

Newarthill

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list existing contracts between the Highways Agency and the United Kingdom company Newarthill and its subsidiaries. [9722]

Mr. Watts: Newarthill is the ultimate parent company of a number of subsidiary firms making up the Sir Robert McAlpine group. The Highways Agency's business contracts are confined to Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd., which is presently undertaking one contract in joint venture with Fitzpatrick Contractors Ltd. The contract is the A406 Silver street to Hall lane, Fore street underpass, which commenced on 24 April 1995.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what levels of noise and settlement in combination with each other will qualify as a serious effect under the Union Railways discretionary purchase scheme published in July 1995 in relation to the channel tunnel rail link. [9088]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* The discretionary purchase guidelines placed in the Library on 19 July 1995 outline the type of factors that Union Railways Ltd. takes into account when deciding whether the enjoyment of a property is likely to be seriously affected. The factors listed are not exhaustive and other factors and combination of factors will be taken into account when considering individual applications.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

North Korea

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response Her Majesty's Government have made to appeals for food aid in response to the famine in North Korea; and if he will make a statement. [9068]

Mr. Hanley: The ODA contributed £150,000 through UN agencies and the International Red Cross to give food and other relief supplies last autumn. We have recently agreed to fund two Save the Children Fund nutritionalists to work with the World Food Programme in North Korea on famine assessment.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Sri Lankan Government on providing financial and material help to rebuild Jaffna; and if he will make a statement. [8559]

Mr. Hanley: We have made clear to the Sri Lankan Government on a number of occasions that we are ready to help in assessing the rehabilitation of power supplies in Jaffna as soon as peace has been restored and the relevant Sri Lankan officials are in place.

Cyprus

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what financial assistance he plans to make available to Cyprus when a settlement is agreed; and if he will make a statement. [8551]

Mr. Hanley: The question of any financial assistance to Cyprus in the context of a settlement will be considered at the appropriate time.

Public Opinion Surveys

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what public opinion surveys his Department has undertaken on attitudes to aid and development issues. [8875]

Mr. Hanley: As part of a survey on the effectiveness of its external communications, the ODA commissioned National Opinion Poll to conduct a public opinion survey in November 1995 which looked generally at the way the public viewed the aid programme.

Bilateral Aid

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which five recipient countries have received the largest *(a)* increase and *(b)* decrease in United Kingdom bilateral aid since 1992. [8871]

Mr. Hanley: Statistics on aid expenditure usually relate to financial years, and in this case cover the changes between 1992–93 and 1994–95, the latest year for which information is available. The table gives the requested information for expenditure on the ODA aid programme, excluding the Commonwealth Development Corporation and expenditure from other Government Departments.

The countries receiving the largest increases and decreases in bilateral ODA aid programme expenditure from 1992–93 to 1994–95

Recipient country	*Change (£ million) 1994–95 cf 1992–93*
Increases	
Rwanda	+45.0
Russia	+20.8
Malawi	+20.3
Pakistan	+8.9
States of ex-Yugoslavia	+8.5
Decreases	
Malaysia[1]	−16.7
Ghana	−15.2
Somalia	−13.7
India	−12.1
Zimbabwe	−11.8

[1] Expenditure on Pergau is included for 1992–93 but not for 1994–95. If expenditure on Pergau were excluded from the 1992–93 figures, Malaysia would no longer appear in the table. Bangladesh would then feature with a decrease of −£10.6 million.

Aid Expenditure (Effects)

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to measure the impact of aid expenditure on the poorest people. [9119]

Mr. Hanley: The ODA's policy information marker system identifies aid used for direct assistance to poor people. More broadly, the ODA assesses the impact of its programmes on poverty reduction through close project monitoring, assessment made at project completion and subsequent project evaluations. The evidence gathered in recent years is summarised in the "Progress Report on ODA's Policy Objectives", dated May 1995, a copy of which is available in the Libraries of the House.

Aid Allocations (Priorities)

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the priority sectors in aid allocations to recipient countries following the Overseas Development Administration's fundamental review of expenditure. [8869]

Mr. Hanley: The ODA will continue to allocate the majority of bilateral aid on a country-by-country basis.

Country strategies and priority sectors will be developed according to the specific needs of individual countries, and in full consultation with them. These programmes will contribute to the wider aims set out in the ODA's revised mission statement.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on current and future regional priorities for the aid programme following the Overseas Development Administration's fundamental expenditure review. [8873]

Mr. Hanley: The fundamental expenditure review confirmed the need for continued substantial levels of concessional aid. The ODA's intention will remain to focus this aid on where it is most needed and where it can do most good. This means that aid will continue to be concentrated on the poorest countries, although there

remains a continuing need for help to be given to countries in transition. The FER concluded that the effectiveness of the aid programme will be increased if substantial aid programmes are confined to a smaller number of recipients. The ODA will continue to move in this direction.

Dominica

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what aid has been provided to Dominica for each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the reasons for the changes in the aid provision. [8697]

Mr. Hanley: UK bilateral aid disbursements to Dominica over the past five financial years were as follows:

1990–91: £1.565 million.

1991–92: £1.986 million.

1992–93: £2.907 million.

1993–94: £2.173 million.

1994–95: £0.287 million.

The lower disbursement figure in 1994–95 relates to the UK's decision to tie the release of funds from our 1993 aid grant to the clearance of arrears on repayments of past UK aid loans to Dominica.

Developing Countries (Private Expenditure)

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the latest figures on private flows from the United Kingdom to developing countries in *(a)* pound sterling and *(b)* as a percentage of GNP. [8949]

Mr. Hanley: The latest estimate of UK private flows to developing countries in 1994 is as follows:

	£ million
Direct investment	3,100
Guaranteed export credits (net)	27
Other bilateral securities and claims	1,241
Total	£4,368
Total as a percentage of GNP	0.64 per cent.

Development Assistance

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the aims and objectives of United Kingdom development assistance following the Overseas Development Administration's fundamental expenditure review. [8874]

Mr. Hanley: The ODA fundamental expenditure review reviewed the ODA's mission statement set out in its 1995 departmental report. It concluded that there was scope for greater clarity and focus about what the ODA should be seeking to achieve. As a consequence, the ODA has adopted the following revised mission statement:

"ODA's purpose is to improve the quality of life of people in poorer countries by contributing to sustainable development and reducing poverty and suffering.

To this end ODA will aim:

- to encourage sound development policies, efficient markets and good government;
- to help people achieve better education and health and to widen opportunities—particularly for women;
- to enhance productive capacity and to conserve the environment; and
- to promote international policies for sustainable development and enhance the effectiveness of multilateral development institutions."

This revised mission statement will appear in ODA's 1996 departmental report.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Civil Service Pension Scheme

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement in respect of the future principal civil service pension scheme. [9110]

Mr. Willetts: Occupational pensions for civil servants will continue to be provided through the principal civil service pension scheme.

Public Service Pensioners

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the pensions payable to public service pensioners in each of the years from 1979 covering grades from CA to assistant secretary, assuming the top of grade retiring salary, the award of pensionable performance pay and 30 years' service. [9111]

Mr. Willetts: This information is available only at disproportionate cost.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what action heads of his Department's executive agencies are taking to safeguard the provision of pre-retirement courses; and if he will make a statement. [9142]

Mr. Willetts: My agency chief executives have no plans to change their arrangements for the provision of pre-retirement courses.

Open Government Code

Dr. Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the total cost to date of publicising *(a)* the citizens charters and *(b)* the open government code. [8557]

Mr. Willetts: To date, 40 main charters have been produced covering a wide range of public services. In addition, there are 8,000 local charters setting out the standards of service that users can expect. The cost of publicising charters is the responsibility of individual Departments and services. This information is not held centrally by my Department and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The total cost to date of specifically publicising the open government code is approximately £183,000.

I gave additional details of the way in which the code has been publicised in my answer to the hon. Member on 9 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *121*.

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what guidance he intends to issue to *(a)* Departments, *(b)* executive agencies, *(c)* non-departmental public bodies and *(d)* outside bodies and arm's-length organisations which he has responsibility for, or an interest in, regarding the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if he will make a statement. [9228]

Mr. Willetts: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 15 January by my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People, *Official Report*, column *417*. I will ensure that the Cabinet Office and those bodies for which it is responsible are made aware of their responsibilities under the Act.

Engagements

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list his engagements for Monday 18 December and for Tuesday 19 December 1995. [8609]

The Deputy Prime Minister: On each day, I had a number of meetings with ministerial colleagues and others.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Executive Agencies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if answers sent to hon. Members in reply to parliamentary questions by the head of executive agencies in her Department are *(a)* seen, *(b)* approved and *(c)* amended by her before they are sent; and if she will identify such letters to which amendments by her have been made in 1994–95. [7837]

Mr. Sproat: Parliamentary questions are passed on to the head of an executive agency for reply when the matter is one delegated to him or her under the agency framework document. The relevant Minister may see a copy of the reply before it is sent, but would not normally intervene in operational matters. In 1994–95 no such replies were amended by Ministers.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what action heads of all her Department's executive agencies are taking to protect pre-retirement courses in the event of such agencies seeking to make economies; and if she will make a statement. [9135]

Mr. Sproat: Neither the Historic Royal Palaces agency nor the Royal Parks agency has any plans to make economies by cutting the provision of pre-retirement training, which we consider to be an important step in preparing our staff for leaving full-time employment.

Television Licences (Visually Impaired Persons)

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when the visually impaired persons rebate on television licence costs was last reviewed; and what the rebate would now be if it had been increased in line with inflation since then. [8554]

Mr. Sproat: The reduction in the television licence fee for registered blind people used to be equivalent to the radio licence fee. The last increase was in 1965 and, since radio licences were abolished in 1971, the reduction in the television licence fee issued to blind people has remained at £1.25. If the reduction had increased with inflation from 1965 it would have risen to £12.65 by November 1995, based on latest available retail prices index figures. A specially adapted monitor which receives broadcast television signals in sound only is available from the Royal National Institute for the Blind. No licence is required to use such a monitor.

BBC World Arabic Service

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will require the British Broadcasting Corporation to explain the circumstances in which the news broadcasters of the BBC World Arabic Service were interrupted during coverage of Her Majesty's Government's decision to deport Professor Mohammed al-Masari; and if she will make a statement. [8723]

Mr. Sproat: I understand that the BBC is investigating as a matter of urgency the circumstances surrounding the reported interruptions to BBC Worldwide's Arabic news service. This television service is a commercial venture and it is for the BBC to decide what action to take in the light of its findings.

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what guidance she intends to issue to *(a)* Departments, *(b)* executive agencies, *(c)* non-departmental public bodies and *(d)* outside bodies and arm's-length organisations which she has responsibility for, or an interest in, regarding the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if she will make a statement. [9233]

Mr. Sproat: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People gave on 15 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *417*. I will ensure that my Department and any bodies for which it is responsible will be made aware of their responsibilities under the Act.

Works of Art

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the allocations made to public institutions in the United Kingdom during the half-year ended 31 December 1995 of individual works of art and museum objects pre-eminent for national, scientific, historic or artistic interest which have been accepted in satisfaction of inheritance tax, together with information, where applicable, as to conditions or wishes expressed by testators or executors in the matter of allocation; and if she will list the works of art and museum objects which

are still awaiting allocation, with the respective dates of their acceptance in satisfaction of inheritance tax. [9015]

Mr. Sproat: The information is as follows:

Item	*To whom allocated*	*Condition/wishes*
Paintings by Joshua Reynolds	National Trust	Condition
Pair of George I Pier Glasses	National Trust	Condition
Chattels from Killerton	National Trust	Condition
Four works of Ben Nicholson and two works by Barbara Hepworth	Tate Gallery	Condition

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the items for which the issuing of export licences was withheld on the recommendation of the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art during the half-year ended 31 December 1995, specifying in each case the valuation and whether an item was exported or retained, with particulars in the latter event of the acquiring institutions; and if she will list any items for which the licences have been withheld but the final disposal of which is not yet decided, specifying in each case *(a)* the valuation and *(b)* the relevant time limit. [9014]

Mr. Sproat: The information is as follows:

Description of item	*Valuation £*	*Outcome*
A painting "The Holy Family", by Giulio Romano, (c.1490–1546)	1,720,320	Export licence granted.
A George II open armchair, c.1727	325,000	Export licence granted.
A pair of George II walnut side chairs, c.1731	446,363	Export licence granted.
A pair of George II open armchairs, 1740	202,912.50	Export licence granted.
A painting "Judith with the Head of Holofernes" by Lucas Cranach the Elder, 1530	314,662.50	Acquired by the Burrell Collection, Glasgow.
A court dress or mantua of ivory silk damask, c.1755	78,826	Acquired by the Royal Ceremonial Dress Collection of the Historic Royal Palaces, Hampton Court.
The Coronation Bible of George III, c.1761	350,000	Export licence granted.
The frame of the Coronation Crown of George IV, 1821	376,000	Export licence application withdrawn.
The frame of the Coronation Crown of Queen Adelaide, 1831	425,000	Export licence application withdrawn.
The frame of the Imperial State Crown of George I, 1715	576,000	Export licence application withdrawn.
A painting "La Lecture de Moliere" by Jean Francois de Troy	4,497,672	Purchased by a UK buyer.
A Celtic buckle from a chariot horse harness, c.1st century A.D.	2,940.63	Acquired by the Kings Lynn Museum.
Three letter-books and a diary of Sir William Boothby (1639–1706)	32,500	Acquired by the British Library.
A drawing "Landscape with Boats on a River and Merchandise on the Shore" by Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, called Il Guercino (1591–1666)	70,000	Export licence granted.
An Anglo-Indian lacquer commode, c.1770—1780	49,000	Export licence application withdrawn.
A painting "The Holy Family with the Infant St. John" by Fra Bartolommeo (1472–1517)	14,000,000	Decision deferred until after 8 May 1996.
A painting "Lord Willoughby de Broke and his family at Breakfast" by Johan Zoffany, c.1766	3,500,000	Decision deferred until after 5 February 1996.
A lady's secretary by Thomas Chippendale (1718–1779)	570,000	Decision deferred until after 5 February 1996.
An archive of manuscripts relating to the editing of "Principia Mathematica" by Sir Isaac Newton c.1726	400,000	Decision deferred until after 5 February 1996.
A collection of architectural drawings for Trentham Hall signed or annotated by Sir Charles Barry and others, 1834–1914	75,820	Decision deferred until after 5 February 1996.

BBC Transmitters

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make it a condition of the acquisition of the BBC transmitters that the company awarded the licence shall have an obligation to *(a)* acquire the ownership, *(b)* maintain and *(c)* fully finance the running of community-owned booster masts throughout Britain. [7733]

Mr. Sproat: The BBC is handling the arrangements for the sale of its transmission services. At present, the responsibility for the ownership, maintenance and funding of community-owned booster masts in Britain lies with the communities themselves. We have no plans to impose on the purchaser of BBC transmission services new obligations in respect of community-owned booster masts.

Delegated Legislation

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many of the powers to make statutory instruments exercisable by the Secretary of State under primary legislation enacted since 1979 are subject to *(a)* the negative and *(b)* the affirmative resolution procedure. [9592]

Mr. Sproat: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Televised Sport

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) which television organisations are giving evidence to the Government in connection with the possible protection for the terrestrial television channels of the major sporting events; [8708]

(2) on what date the Government begin their consideration of the coverage of major sporting events on terrestrial television; [8709]

(3) when she expects the Government's consideration of protection of major sporting events for the terrestrial television channels to be completed; [8707]

(4) if she will list the people who are currently considering the issue of how to protect the major sporting events for the terrestrial television channels. [8706]

Mr. Sproat: The Government's position is that sporting bodies should in general be free to sell their broadcasting rights in the interests of their sport. We have received a number of representations, and are aware of public debate on this issue; and we are keeping our policy undercloserevieW.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Numeracy and Literacy Centres

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what consultations she has had with local education authorities concerning her proposal to establish numeracy and literacy centres; what will be the basis of selection for those attending; and if attendence will be voluntary or optional or obligatory additional to existing teaching duties or on secondment for an existing appointment. [8459]

Mr. Robin Squire: Departmental officials consulted the local authority associations on the nature of the scheme and have offered all local education authorities the opportunity to attend a discussion on 16 January to inform the production of their bids.

Details of the operation of the scheme and the criteria for selection of LEAs are included in the letter which was sent to all chief education officers on 5 January. I will write to the hon. Member enclosing a copy of this letter, and will place copies of the letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

Barnsley and Doncaster Training and Enterprise Council

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the impact of the Budget on Barnsley and Doncaster TEC; and if she will make a statement. [8456]

Mr. Paice: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment wrote to all training and enterprise council chairmen in England on 28 November regarding the effects of the budget announcement on TECs. Officials from the Government office for Yorkshire and Humberside have had preliminary meetings with all TECs in the region. Detailed discussions with Barnsley and Doncaster TEC will begin later this month.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the accuracy of the published information on the value of Barnsley and Doncaster TEC's contract with the Employment Department in the financial year 1994–95; and if she will make a statement. [8430]

Mr. Paice: Information on the Barnsley and Doncaster training and enterprise council's budget for 1994–95 was published on 22 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *102*, in a written answer to the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) and the TEC's annual report for 1994–95 indicates income and expenditure relating to a range of activities, including those for which the Department contracts with the TEC. The accuracy of the written answer was checked by my officials, and the financial information in the TEC's annual report is extracted from the annual statutory report and accounts which are subject to external audit.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what negotiations have taken place between her Department and Barnsley and Doncaster TEC to make provision for employment for the over-45 year age group; and if she will make a statement. [8431]

Mr. Paice: Negotiations between the Department and Barnsley and Doncaster training and enterprise council cover a number of matters, including training for work which is open to eligible unemployed adults up to the age of 63. Clients in the over 45 age group also have access to a range of Employment Service programmes through the local jobcentres.

Youth Training Scheme (Walthamstow)

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many eligible young people in Walthamstow are currently unable to obtain a place on a youth training scheme. [8975]

Mr. Paice: There are no young people in Walthamstow for whom the youth training guarantee has not been met.

Nursery Voucher Scheme

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of the number of new nursery places likely to be created in the nursery voucher pilot scheme areas as a result of the voucher scheme. [9058]

Mr. Robin Squire: The number of additional places created through the nursery voucher scheme will depend on the response of providers to parental demand. I am confident that providers of all types, either alone or in partnership with each other, will satisfy parental demand over time.

Ms Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of the number of Office for Standards in Education inspections of nursery providers that will be carried out in the nursery voucher pilot areas during phase 1; what these inspections will cost; and what extra resources will be made available to Ofsted to accommodate increased inspection. [8719]

Mr. Squire: Setting aside maintained schools which are already subject to regular inspection by Ofsted, initial planning estimates indicate that for the first phase of the scheme some 600 inspections of voucher redeeming establishments will be required. The precise number will depend upon the number of providers who take part in the scheme.

A total of £5 million has been set aside for the inspection and administration during the first phase, the greater proportion of which will be spent on the recruitment and training of inspectors in preparation for the second phase.

Post-GCSE Pupils

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what statistics are maintained *(a)* nationally and *(b)* regionally providing details of the movement of pupils in the two years following GCSE. [8540]

Mr. Paice: Statistics are collected by careers services on the first destinations of all 16-year-olds following the completion of their compulsory education. The local area statistics are aggregated to provide regional and national figures. The findings are normally published early the following year and the report on the destinations of the 1995 year group is expected shortly. In recent years the report has been published by the Association of County Councils with the support of the UK heads of careers services and the Department.

Additionally, since 1985 the Department has funded the youth cohort study. This is a postal questionnaire survey of approximately 20,000 young people in their first year after the end of compulsory schooling. The sample is representative of young people of the given age group in England and Wales.

Further questionnaires are sent to the same young people in each of the following two years, so providing information on their progress at 16–17, 17–18, 18–19 years of age.

The YCS provides detailed information on the school experience, current activity, education, qualifications, employment and training of young people, together with a small amount of contextual socio-demographic background data. The study was designed to provide a national picture and reports normally concentrate on national figures.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will collect statistics on the movement of pupils in the two years following GCSE. [8541]

Mr. Paice: The Department plans to extend the requirement on careers services so that they also collect information on the first destinations of 17 and 18-year-old school leavers. In future years this requirement may be further extended to include the corresponding further education college leavers and provide a fuller picture.

Classroom Violence

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many teachers have been subjected to violence in the classroom in each year since 1990. [9259]

Mr. Robin Squire: This information is not available centrally.

Office for Standards in Education

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will give a breakdown of the Ofsted budget for 1996–97; and if she will make a statement. [9556]

Mr. Robin Squire: This is a matter for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, who heads the Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

Training for Work

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what considerations led the Government office for the north-west and the Employment Service not to consult training providers for their views in compiling the north-west training for work study. [9703]

Mr. Paice: The study was designed to identify how training and enterprise councils and the Employment Service could work together more effectively to enhance the take-up of training for work opportunities. It is a highly focused study and there was insufficient time available for another study involving training providers or interviews of TFW participants.

The results were subsequently discussed at a workshop that involved a number of training providers and their views have been taken into account by TECs, the ES and the Government office in managing TFW.

Education Budget (Metropolitan Counties)

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the percentage of each of the metropolitan counties' education budget which is spent on *(a)* schools and *(b)* on non-school expenditure together with the amount of money this represents per school pupil in each case. [8882]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following table shows for each metropolitan county local education authority the percentage of net recurrent expenditure spent in

1993–94, the latest year for which figures are available, on: *(a)* pre-primary, primary, secondary and special schools; and *(b)* other education services, including education other than at school, adult education, continuing education, discretionary awards, youth and other community services, service strategy and regulation and education support services. The table also shows the amount spent per pupil, although in the case of non-schools expenditure school pupils are not the principal clients and the figures are not therefore meaningful.

Expenditure on Education and its cost per pupil—Metropolitan LEAs
Net recurrent expenditure 1993–94

	Pre-primary/primary secondary and special		*Non-school*	
	Percentage of expenditure (a)	*Cost per pupil*	*Percentage of expenditure (b)*	*Cost per pupil*
Birmingham	95	2,313	5	112
Coventry	90	2,319	10	248
Dudley	90	1,950	10	210
Sandwell	94	2,241	6	152
Solihull	94	1,939	6	121
Walsall	89	2,103	11	247
Wolverhampton	91	2,313	9	215
Knowsley	91	2,393	9	239
Liverpool	93	2,260	7	182
St. Helens	96	2,270	4	87
Sefton	96	2,102	4	86
Wirral	93	2,210	7	176
Bolton	94	2,074	6	130
Bury	93	2,084	7	146
Manchester	94	2,531	6	150
Oldham	94	2,110	6	143
Rochdale	92	2,130	8	182
Salford	94	2,107	6	127
Stockport	89	1,954	11	247
Tameside	93	1,975	7	139
Trafford	96	2,095	4	93
Wigan	96	2,093	4	77
Barnsley	94	2,090	6	143
Doncaster	97	2,236	3	79
Rotherham	94	2,187	6	134
Sheffield	90	2,161	10	230
Bradford	96	2,276	4	90
Calderdale	92	2,049	8	169
Kirklees	91	2,225	9	222
Leeds	91	2,115	9	197
Wakefield	96	2,124	4	98
Gateshead	86	2,167	14	346
Newcastle upon Tyne	89	2,250	11	271
North Tyneside	94	2,104	6	123
South Tyneside	89	1,950	11	241
Sunderland	95	2,045	5	118
Total	93	2,179	7	161

Teachers

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many teachers are employed in each local education authority *(a)* currently *(b)* in 1979, *(c)* in 1985 and *(d)* in 1990; and if she will make a statement. [8676]

Mr. Robin Squire: The full-time equivalent numbers of teachers employed in each local authority area in the maintained—including grant-maintained—nursery, primary and secondary sector in January 1995 are shown in the following table. The table excludes staff in sixth form colleges which transferred to the further education sector on 1 April 1993.

Information for the years 1979, 1985 and 1990 include sixth form colleges and are contained in the Department of Education and Science "Pupil/Teacher Ratios in each Local Education Authority in England", statistical bulletins 17/79, 6/86 and 5/91, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Full-time equivalent teachers employed by local education authorities and grant-maintained schools in the nursery, primary and secondary[1] sector

England	*January 1995*
Local education authority area	*FTE of teachers*
Corporation of London	16
Camden	1,346
Greenwich	1,939
Hackney	1,429
Hammersmith and Fulham	941
Islington	1,360
Kensington and Chelsea	674
Lambeth	1,680
Lewisham	1,863
Southwark	1,687

Full-time equivalent teachers employed by local education authorities and grant-maintained schools in the nursery, primary and secondary[1] sector

England — *January 1995*

Local education authority area	*FTE of teachers*
Tower Hamlets	2,250
Wandsworth	1,561
Westminster	1,121
Barking and Dagenham	1,446
Barnet	2,638
Bexley	1,836
Brent	1,971
Bromley	2,181
Croydon	2,409
Ealing	2,097
Enfield	2,358
Haringey	1,730
Harrow	1,576
Havering	1,891
Hillingdon	1,870
Hounslow	1,890
Kingston upon Thames	1,057
Merton	1,269
Newham	1,968
Redbridge	1,937
Richmond upon Thames	1,052
Sutton	1,354
Waltham Forest	1,706
Birmingham	9,366
Coventry	2,657
Dudley	2,576
Sandwell	2,689
Solihull	1,845
Walsall	2,560
Wolverhampton	2,377
Knowsley	1,446
Liverpool	4,194
St. Helens	1,635
Sefton	2,546
Wirral	2,927
Bolton	2,467
Bury	1,420
Manchester	3,587
Oldham	2,202
Rochdale	1,819
Salford	1,821
Stockport	2,185
Tameside	1,842
Trafford	1,694
Wigan	2,754
Barnsley	1,704
Doncaster	2,703
Rotherham	2,440
Sheffield	3,719
Bradford	4,779
Calderdale	1,769
Kirklees	3,373
Leeds	5,759
Wakefield	2,704
Gateshead	1,715
Newcastle upon Tyne	2,104
North Tyneside	1,639
South Tyneside	1,340
Sunderland	2,728
Isles of Scilly	26
Avon	7,677
Bedfordshire	5,008
Berkshire	6,171
Buckinghamshire	5,310
Cambridge	5,573
Cheshire	8,013
Cleveland	5,189
Cornwall	3,675
Cumbria	4,016
Derbyshire	7,555
Devon	7,437
Dorset	4,393
Durham	5,117
East Sussex	4,899
Essex	11,771
Gloucestershire	4,258
Hampshire	11,871
Hereford and Worcester	5,329
Hertfordshire	8,725
Humberside	7,394
Isle of Wight	999
Kent	12,552
Lancashire	12,088
Leicestershire	7,810
Lincolnshire	4,877
Norfolk	5,898
North Yorkshire	5,774
Northamptonshire	5,624
Northumberland	2,672
Nottinghamshire	8,354
Oxfordshire	4,426
Shropshire	3,384
Somerset	3,665
Staffordshire	8,245
Suffolk	5,466
Surrey	6,529
Warwickshire	4,027
West Sussex	5,230
Wiltshire	4,698
England	392,910

[1] Excluding sixth form colleges which transferred to the new FE sector on 1 April 1993.

Delegated Legislation

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many of the powers to make statutory instruments exercisable by the Secretary of State under primary legislation enacted since 1979 are subject to *(a)* the negative and *(b)* the affirmative resolution procedure. [9585]

Mr. Robin Squire: This information cannot be supplied other than at disproportionate cost, but the overwhelming majority of statutory instruments which are subject to parliamentary procedure are subject to the negative procedure.

Employment Advertisements (Age Limit)

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what her Department's policy towards banning an upper age limit in employment advertisements. [9724]

Mrs. Gillan: The Department remains committed to the elimination of upper age limits in job advertisements. Age discrimination makes no business sense and that is why the Government's campaign for older workers continues to emphasise this to employers. Increasing numbers of employers are responding to the message and are recruiting people on the basis of ability and skill and

not age. The Department has produced a series of publications aimed at employers and older workers as part of a co-ordinated campaign.

The campaign's latest publication, "Age Works", encourages recruitment agencies and employment businesses to oppose age discrimination in the selection and recruitment of older workers in their job vacancies. Another publication to be published later this year targets the recruitment advertising industry.

Social and Economic Deprivation

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment where the district which includes the Hastings travel-to-work area lies for levels of social and economic deprivation in relation to other London and south-east districts. [7796]

Mr. Clappison: I have been asked to reply.

The Department's index of local conditions shows that Hastings is the 23rd most deprived district out of a total of 103 districts in London and the south-east.

Strikes

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many working days have been lost through strike action in 1994; and what were the equivalent figures for each of the last 16 years. [9545]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have been asked to reply.

Data for working days lost through strike action in the United Kingdom are given in the following table:

Year	*Working days lost (Thousands)*
1978	9,405
1979	29,474
1980	11,964
1981	4,266
1982	5,313
1983	3,754
1984	27,135
1985	6,402
1986	1,920
1987	3,546
1988	3,702
1989	4,128
1990	1,903
1991	761
1992	528
1993	649
1994	278

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Mobile Phones

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many mobile phones have been supplied to his Department in each of the last eight years; and in each of those years how many different suppliers were involved. [8038]

Mr. Boswell: The Ministry and its associated executive agencies have been procuring mobile phones since 1990. Therefore, the information that follows covers the period from April 1990 to date.

We currently have approximately 1,469 mobile phones which were procured under centrally negotiated call-off arrangements. Two suppliers have been used, Racal Vodafone (Vodac Ltd.) from 1 April 1990 to 28 February 1993 and Mercury Communications Ltd. from 1 March 1993 to present.

The Ministry will shortly be tendering its requirements for mobile phones.

The number of mobile phones bought each year are as follows:

1990: 32
1991: 137
1992: 162
1993: 398
1994: 506
1995: 234.

Livestock Transport

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from *(a)* individual farmers and *(b)* farming organisations about the practical consequences of implementing EC directive 95/29 on livestock transport in sparsely populated areas. [8200]

Mrs. Browning: Out of a total of 127 responses to our recent consultation exercise on proposals for implementing Council directive 95/29/EC, *(a)* two individuals and *(b)* 13 farming organisations raised the issue of implementation in sparsely populated areas. Over 680 organisations and individuals were consulted in England and Wales.

Food Regulations

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the food regulations that ceased to be effective in the United Kingdom on 1 January; and if he will make a statement. [8451]

Mrs. Browning: The following regulations, and any amendments to them, were revoked on 1 January 1996:

Food Standards (General Provisions) Order 1994
Food Standards (Fish Cakes) Order 1950
Skimmed Milk and Non-Milk Fat Regulations 1960
Skimmed Milk with Non-Milk Fat (Scotland) Regulations 1960
Soft Drinks Regulations 1964
Soft Drinks (Scotland) Regulations 1964
Meat (Treatment) Regulations 1964
Meat (Treatment) (Scotland) Regulations 1964
Butter Regulations 1966
Butter (Scotland) Regulations 1966
Margarine Regulations 1967
Margarine (Scotland) Regulations 1970
Ice-Cream Regulations 1967
Solvents in Food (Scotland) Regulations 1968
Cheese Regulations 1970
Cheese (Scotland) Regulations 1970

Cream Regulations 1970

Cream (Scotland) Regulations 1970

Colouring Matter in Food Regulations 1973

Colouring Matter in Food (Scotland) Regulations 1973

Antioxidants in Food Regulations 1978

Antioxidants in Food (Scotland) Regulations 1978

Miscellaneous Additives in Food Regulations 1980

Miscellaneous Additives in Food (Scotland) Regulations 1980

Sweeteners in Food Regulations 1983

Sweeteners in Food (Scotland) Regulations 1983

Bread and Flour Regulations 1984

Bread and Flour (Scotland) Regulations 1984

Preservatives in Food Regulations 1989

Preservatives in Food (Scotland) Regulations 1989

Emulsifiers and Stabilisers in Food Regulations 1989

Emulsifiers and Stabilisers in Food (Scotland) Regulations 1989

Potassium Bromate (Prohibition as a Flour Improver) Regulations 1990

Potassium Bromate (Prohibition as a Flour Improver) (Scotland) Regulations 1990.

Integrated Administration and Control System

Mr. Key: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received following his decision to hold back payment of IACS cheques to farmers from December 1995 to January 1996; and if he will make a statement. [9336]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* Some 83 per cent. of claims under the arable area payments scheme were paid before 31 December 1995. We regret the delay to the remainder, which will be paid as soon as possible. Representations have been received from farming organisations and a number of individuals about the delay in making the remaining payments.

TREASURY

Monetary Union

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what considerations underlay his assessment of the prospects for the success of the Euro following the Madrid summit. [7725]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My assessment was based on my experience of frequent discussions of the subject at European Councils and ECOFIN meetings over the past two and a half years.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will ask his panel of independent experts to report on the likelihood of the achievement of monetary union and the implications of the single currency for Britain; [7430]

(2) if he will commission and publish a report on the benefits and problems of monetary union, assessing the case for and against and the benefits and disbenefits of the United Kingdom's remaining outside. [7434]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Panel of Independent Forecasters' May 1995 report examined economic and monetary union. A copy of this report is available from the House of Commons Library.

Protocol No. 11, annexed to the EC treaty, means that the United Kingdom shall not be obliged or committed to move to the third stage of economic and monetary union without a separate decision to do so by the Government and Parliament. We will agree to take part in a single currency only if it is in our national interest to do so, given the circumstances at the time.

Tax (Self-assessment)

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many tax inspectors will deal with self-assessment in *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96, *(c)* 1996–97 and 1997–98. [8313]

Mr. Jack: Self-assessment will start with the 1996–97 tax year, and the tax return issued in April 1997. Accordingly, no tax inspectors will be dealing with self-assessment returns in advance of that date, although many inspectors have spent time helping taxpayers to prepare for self-assessment, giving seminars to local accountants, and so on. The need for tax inspector involvement in the work will increase progressively throughout 1997–98 and into 1998–99, as returns are received from taxpayers.

The Inland Revenue currently employs approximately 6,000 tax inspectors in local offices. Many of these deal with the affairs of taxpayers who receive tax returns, and will continue to do so when they start to received self-assessment tax returns.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many persons who are not currently using accountants the Department estimates will use accountants when the programme of self-assessment is introduced. [8317]

Mr. Jack: Neither the extensive market research programme nor surveys of those who have helped test the new tax return has yielded evidence that significant numbers of people will start to engage accountants as a result of self-assessment. On the contrary, some taxpayers viewed self-assessment as an opportunity to dispense with the services upon which they had previously depended.

A full trial of the system is taking place in Leicester and may give a clearer indication of likely attitudes in the light of experience of the new system. No such data are yet available.

The Inland Revenue considers that it is not necessary for those people who do not currently use the services of an accountant to engage one as a result of self-assessment. Those taxpayers who do not wish to calculate their own tax bill can ask the Inland Revenue to do it for them free of charge.

Income Tax Thresholds

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the maximum by which income tax thresholds could be raised as a consequence of a

revenue reduction of *(a)* £1 billion, *(b)* £2 billion, *(c)* £3 billion, *(d)* £4 billion, *(e)* £5 billion and *(f)* £6 billion. [8476]

Mr. Jack: Latest estimates are that the personal allowance, including the age-related personal allowances, could be raised by the following amounts for the corresponding full year costs at 1996–97 levels.

Increase in non aged and aged personal allowances £	*Full year cost at 1996–97 levels* £ billion
160	1
320	2
480	3
650	4
820	5
1,000	6

Executive Agencies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action heads of his Department's executive agencies are taking to safeguard the provision of pre-retirement courses; and if he will make a statement. [9151]

Mr. Jack: The Treasury has no executive agencies.

Incomes

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average income of the highest paid 1 per cent. of the population in each year since 1966; what was the percentage increase in each year; and what was the value of each year's income at 1995 prices. [9271]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Information which can be provided, using new earnings survey data, is given in the following table. It is not possible to provide this level of data before 1986.

Earnings for years before 1995 can be converted to 1995 levels using the retail prices index (all items). This information is published in the Central Statistical Office *Business Monitor* MM23, a copy of which is available in the Library.

New Earnings Survey 1986–1995 (Great Britain)

Year	*1 per cent. earned more than* £	*Gross average weekly earnings highest paid 1 per cent.* £	*Percentage increase on previous year*
1986	541	730	—
1987	602	838	14.9
1988	674	968	15.5
1989	768	1,086	12.1
1990	845	1,185	9.2
1991	908	1,255	5.9
1992	961	1,349	7.5
1993	1,025	1,490	10.5
1994	1,028	1,481	-0.6
1995	1,083	1,597	7.8

Full-time employees on adult rates, whose pay for the survey period was unaffected by absence

Exports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are United Kingdom relative export unit values at current rates of exchange *(a)* at the latest available date and *(b)* at the time of United Kingdom entry into the exchange rate mechanism. [9784]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: United Kingdom relative export unit values are published in table 2.15 of "Economic Trends". These figures are also available on the CSO central database, under the identifier FLAA, which can be accessed through the Library of the House.

Money Supply

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each year since 1966 the percentage changes in the real money supply. [9783]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Data for the narrow and broad measures of the money stock are available in tables 3.1C and 3.1D of "Financial Statistics". Data for the GDP deflator (table 2) and other measures of prices including underlying retail prices (table 23) are available in "Economic Trends". Both these publications are available in the House of Commons Library.

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the impact of the United Kingdom's membership of the exchange rate mechanism on *(a)* manufacturing jobs and *(b)* manufacturing plants. [9785]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The United Kingdom's membership of the ERM will have been one of the many features of economic policy and conditions at the time that affected manufacturing jobs and manufacturing plants. It is not possible to quantify precisely with any confidence the effects of ERM membership or any other specific feature of economic policy in isolation from others. ERM membership played an important part in enabling the United Kingdom to begin to reduce inflation and so begin the economic recovery which we are still experiencing.

Personal Pensions (Tax Relief)

Mr. Denham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the cost to date of tax relief allowed in respect of appropriate personal pensions contracted out of the state earnings-related pension scheme of individuals with annual earnings of *(a)* £2,000 or below, *(b)* up to £3,000, *(c)* up to £4,000, *(d)* up to £5,000, *(e)* up to £6,000, *(f)* up to £7,000, *(g)* up to £8,000, *(h)* up to £9,000 and *(i)* up to £10,000. [8175]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* I regret that the distribution of tax relief by earnings of participants is not available, but the total cost of tax relief for personal pensions is published annually in table 1.6 of "Inland Revenue Statistics".

714I and SC60 Tax Certificates

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many taxpayers used *(a)* 714I and *(b)* SC60 certificates in each of the last five years. [8321]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 9 January 1996]:* I refer to the reply which the then Financial Secretary gave to the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) on 15 March 1995, *Official Report*, column *608*. The number of 714I holders recorded in April 1995 was 412,913.

The latest figures available are for October 1995, when 403,502 714I holders were recorded.

Small Businesses

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of his Budget proposals on small businesses during the next five years. [8560]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* The Budget will encourage growth in output and jobs in small firms.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what legal costs, arising from the Scott inquiry, have been incurred by the Department on behalf of current and past *(a)* civil servants and *(b)* advisers and secondees; [8745]

(2) what legal costs, arising from the Scott inquiry, have been incurred, on behalf of Ministers and ex-Ministers, by his Department; and if he will name the individuals concerned. [8756]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* The value of accounts settled to date from public funds for the provision of external legal services, incurred by my Department on behalf of Ministers, ex-Ministers, civil servants, former civil servants, and other advisers and secondees in connection with the Scott inquiry is £60,440. The cost of any advice in connection with the Scott inquiry given by Government lawyers as part of their normal duties cannot be quantified. It is not the Government's policy to identify the individuals who have received legal advice, either directly or indirectly.

Environmental Pollution Report

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what dates and on what matters, in connection with the 18th report of the Royal Commission on environmental pollution, "Transport and the Environment", he has made representations to the Secretary of State for Transport. [9094]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* There have been many contacts between the Treasury and the Department of Transport concerning the royal commission report since its publication in October 1994, including several discussions at both official and ministerial level.

Long-term Care

Mr. Denham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the assumptions used to calculate the cost of the increased lower and upper capital limits for long-term care announced in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report"; how many additional people he expects to qualify next year under the new capital limits; how many would have qualified next year under the existing capital limits; and how many qualified in the current financial year. [8653]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* A wide range of data and assumptions underpinned determination of the provision for long-term care capital limit increases set out in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report". Of the order of 50,000 people currently in residential or nursing home care can expect to benefit from the increases. At the end of the last financial year, around 370,000 people received public support for residential or nursing home care.

Student Loans Company

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he proposes to take over the consequences for the Department for Education budget of the revenue effects of the postponement of the policy of transferring Student Loans Company assets to the private sector. [9177]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* The postponement of the introduction of private loans will mean that the resultant savings will not be made in 1996–97. The Government will be considering what, if any, steps need to be taken as a consequence.

Pension Funds

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list each of the public sector pension funds detailing *(a)* the size of each scheme and *(b)* if it is funded or unfunded. [8565]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* Full details are not held centrally. Information covering the main public service schemes is as follows:

Scheme	*Size (number of active members)*	*Type*
Local government	1,190,000	Funded
NHS	870,000	Unfunded
Teachers	610,000	Unfunded
Civil Service	520,000	Unfunded
Armed forces	230,000	Unfunded
Police	140,000	Unfunded
Fire	40,000	Unfunded

DEFENCE

Porton Down

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the extramural contractors to the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down, who have agreed to their contractual relationship to the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment being disclosed to the public, outlining the subject of the contract, its value and its duration; and how many extramural contractors refused to have their contractual relationship being disclosed to the public; [7298]

(2) how many contracts in universities are being funded by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down; how many universities have these contracts; what is the total value of these contracts; how

many of these contracts are classified; how many of these contractors have agreed to allow their contractual relationship to the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment to be disclosed to the public; and how many have refused. [7299]

Mr. Arbuthnot: These matters are for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 16 January 1996:

Your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence asking for details relating to extramural contractors to the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down and also for details of contracts with universities has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes CBDE as one of its divisions. I am answering both questions in this letter.

In order to avoid any confusion I should explain that we do not make any distinction between extramural research contracts and research contracts specifically with universities. The information you have asked for refers, therefore, to one group of extramural contracts with universities, research institutes and industrial companies.

As at Tuesday 9 January 1996 CBDE Porton Down had 53 of these contracts. Nineteen of the contractors have confirmed that they are prepared to have their contractual relationship disclosed to the public and, in fact, they are all universities. Fourteen have declined to make all the details of their relationship known to the public of which nine are in universities. The remaining twenty contractors have not declared their position, six of these being in universities.

Of theses 53 contracts a total of 42 have been placed with 21 universities. They have a value of approximately £5 million and a duration varying from several months to a few years. None of them are classified.

The nineteen university contractors who are prepared to make details of their relationship known to the public are:

Birmingham

Three contracts with a total value of £450K concerned with aspects of detection and decontamination. Duration between 2 to 4 years.

Bristol

Two contracts with a total value of £226K concerned with aspects of the medical countermeasures programme. Duration 3 years.

Durham

One contract with a total value of £98K concerned with aspects of the protective equipment programme. Duration 3 years.

Hull

Two contracts with a total value of £105K concerned with chemical analysis. Duration 3 to 4 years.

Leeds

One contract with a total value of £84k concerned with aspects of the medical countermeasures programme. Duration 3 years.

Newcastle

One contract with a total value of £68K concerned with aspects of the medical countermeasures programme. Duration 3 years.

Southampton

Two contracts with a total value of £178K concerned with aspects of the medical countermeasures and protective equipment programmes. Duration 1 and 4 years.

Warwick

One contract with a total value of £156K concerned with the hazard assessment research programme. Duration 4 years.

UMIST

Five contracts with a total value of £780K concerned with aspects of the hazard assessment and protective equipment research programmes. Duration between 1 and 3 years.

I hope this information is helpful.

Chemical and Biological Weapons

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the purpose of tests and studies carried out by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment on service volunteers with the nerve agent Tabun; when these tests and studies were first carried out; in which scientific journals the results of these tests and studies have been published; and what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the health effects of long-term exposure to Tabun. [9041]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 16 January 1996:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what was the purpose of tests and studies carried out by the Chemical Defence Establishment on service volunteers with the nerve agent Tabun; when these tests were first carried out; in which scientific journals the results have been published; and what research his department has a) commissioned and b) evaluated into the health effects of long term exposure to Tabun has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment as one of its divisions.

Studies to evaluate the nerve agent Tabun were conducted following the discovery of this agent in German shells found after the collapse of the Third Reich at the end of the Second World War. The purpose of the investigations was to determine the incapacitating effects on service personnel resulting from exposure to sub-lethal doses. Military interest has always been concerned with short term exposure and no studies to assess the effects of long term exposure to any nerve agents have been carried out. Work with Tabun involving the use of service volunteers ended over 40 years ago. We can find no record of any results of the studies undertaken appearing in the scientific literature. It is probable that security considerations precluded the open publication of this work at the time it was conducted in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many times the steering group of the 1980 memorandum of understanding on chemical and biological defence between the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States of America has met since November 1992; where these meetings were held; what was decided at each of these meetings; and if he will place copies of the minutes of these meetings in the Library. [9043]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The steering group of the 1980 memorandum of understanding on chemical and biological defence between the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States of America has met three times since November 1992: in Canada in November 1993; in the United States of America in November 1994; and in the United Kingdom in November 1995. These meetings addressed policy on tri-national collaboration. The

proceedings of these meetings are security classified. It is not therefore appropriate to place copies of the minutes in the Library of the House.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what grounds members of the ethics committee overseeing the service volunteers programme at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment are chosen; if members are required to sign the Official Secrets Act; what access they are given to classified information; and what annual reports this committee produces on its work. [9044]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Individuals are invited to become members of the independent ethics committee on the grounds that their expertise and experience complements those of the existing members, taking into consideration the guidelines on the constitution of ethics committees published by the Royal College of Physicians. The members of the committee are required to sign the Official Secrets Act as they have unrestricted access to any classified information which may related to the decisions taken by the committee. The committee produces an annual report which is given a security classification appropriate to the work conducted in that year.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the ethics committee overseeing the service volunteers programme at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment since 1991 had previously *(a)* served on a committee related to the work of Porton Down, *(b)* worked at Porton Down and *(c)* been in receipt of an extramural contract from Porton Down. [9045]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Two members of the independent ethics committee were members of the medical committee of the Chemical and biological defence board of the Defence Scientific Advisory Council in the 1970s and 1980s. The chemical, biological and human technology board replaced the chemical and biological defence board in 1994. Three members of the committee are members of the successor board. None of the independent members of the ethics committee has been employed at CBDE Porton Down. The technical director and the senior military officer of CBDE, who are in attendance at the ethics committee meetings, are employees of the Ministry of Defence. None of the members of the ethics committee is currently in receipt of an extramural contract from Porton Down

Arms Sales

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what volume of arms and of what type was sold from the United Kingdom to *(a)* Nigeria, *(b)* Indonesia and *(c)* Turkey in each of the past five years. [9565]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade on 19 December 1995, *Official Report*, columns *1081–82*. Beyond this, it remains Government policy not to reveal details of exports of defence equipment to particular countries. However, some additional information can be found in the annual UK return to the "UN Register of Conventional Arms", and in table 1.11 of the "UK Defence Statistics". Both documents have been placed in the Library of the House.

Army Technical Support Agency

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment he has made of the possible redundancies within the Army Technical Support Agency if printing and distribution of technical documents and publications are privatised; and if he will make a statement; [9611]

(2) what assessment he has made of the security implications of contracting out the non-core activities of the Army Technical Support Agency; and if he will make a statement; [9612]

(3) what further plans he has for privatising non-core activities of the Army Technical Support Agency; [9613]

(4) what assessment he has made of the number of redundancies that will occur in the Army Technical Support Agency directorate of technical services at Woolwich as a result of current privatisation plans; [9614]

(5) what assessment he has made of the benefits of market testing or contracting out the printing and distribution of Ministry of Defence technical documents and publications. [9610]

Mr. Soames: These are matters for the chief executive of the Army Technical Support Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from J. R. Prince to Mr. John Austin-Walker, dated 16 January 1996:

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS—ARMY TECHNICAL SUPPORT AGENCY

I am replying to five questions to the Secretary of State for Defence about Army Technical Support Agency (ATSA) business as this falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the ATSA.

Question: What assessment has been made of the possible redundancies within the ATSA if printing and distribution of technical documents and publications are privatised?

Answer: The next exact number of redundancies which will result from contractorisation of printing and distribution of technical documentation is the subject of an on-going internal study, the results of which are still awaited. The Trade Unions have been advised accordingly and I will ensure that they and yourself are informed of the outcome as soon as possible.

Question: What assessment has been made of the security implications of contracting out the non core activities of the ATSA?

Answer: At present the only ATSA activity with security implications subject to contractorisation considerations is that of printing and distribution. Approximately 1% of the work has security implications. Potential contractors will only be considered providing they meet the MODs security requirements.

Question: What further plans has CE ATSA for privatising non core activities of the ATSA?

Answer: The current ATSA Competing for Quality (CFQ) programme, which includes all aspects of Technical Documentation and Publications, and site management services, is ongoing and may lead to further contractorisation. Any additional proposals will be consulted in the normal manner.

Question: What assessment has been made of the number of redundancies that will occur in the ATSA Directorate of Technical Services (DTS) at Woolwich as a result of current privatisation plans?

Answer: The exact number of redundancies resulting from the contractorisation of printing and distribution of technical documentation is the subject of an on-going internal study, the results of which are still awaited. The Trade Unions have been advised accordingly and I will ensure that they and yourself are informed of the outcome as soon as possible.

Question: What assessment has been made of the benefits of market testing or contracting out the printing and distribution of MOD technical documents and publications?

Answer: The ATSA study into the future of printing and distribution of MOD technical publications concluded that no work should be undertaken on the market testing option as the value of the ATSA print and distribution package is well below the recommended market testing threshold of £5M. This, coupled with the cost of having to collocate the unit as part of the ATSA restructuring programme, if the in-house bid won, made the market testing option non-viable.

Serving Mothers

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many serving mothers are currently in post with the Royal Irish Regiment in Northern Ireland. [8212]

Mr. Soames: There are five female officers and 208 service women currently in post with the Royal Irish Regiment in Northern Ireland who have dependent children.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discretion is afforded to commanding officers of armed forces regiments in assignment of duties for young mothers who wish to develop careers as serving soldiers while their children are of pre-school attendance age. [8213]

Mr. Soames: Commanding officers may exercise discretion in the day-to-day employment of soldiers under their command, subject to the needs of the service. However, it is also the responsibility of all soldiers—male and female, single or married—to make suitable arrangements for the care of their children so that they are fully able to meet their service commitments.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to what extent mothers of young children in the armed forces are required to carry out the same duties as male soldiers. [8214]

Mr. Soames: Female personnel with young children are, in common with all other service personnel, with or without the care and control of young children, expected to carry out the full range of duties for which they are employed. However, in accordance with health and safety regulations, special considerations apply to pregnant women and breast-feeding mothers which may result in their employment on alternative duties.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the terms and conditions of service in the armed forces for serving mothers with young children will be reviewed. [8215]

Mr. Soames: There are no plans for a special review of the terms and conditions of service for serving mothers with young children. A fundamental review of the terms and conditions of service for all service personnel is taking place under the independent review.

Beaufort's Dyke

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what information he received in respect of explosions on the sea bed in and around Beaufort's dyke in the North channel during 1995; when he received this information; what action he is taking as a result; and if he will make a statement; [8323]

(2) if he will list the explosions on the sea bed in and around Beaufort's dyke in the North channel notified to his Department for each year form 1979 to 1994, indicating the assumed cause of such explosions. [8324]

Mr. Soames: My Department has only recently received information about probable explosions dating back to 1982 from the British Geological Survey. There are many possible explanations for the readings recorded by the British Geological Survey, but the information provided is incomplete, and accordingly it is not yet possible to make a full analysis of the data.

Electricity Interconnector

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will *(a)* publish and *(b)* place in the Library all correspondence between his Department and Scottish Power and Northern Ireland Electricity on the route of the proposed electricity interconnector between Scotland and Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [8325]

Mr. Soames: It is not our general practice to publish current correspondence between my Department and others.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what further assessment he has made in respect of his Department's advice to Scottish Power and Northern Ireland Electricity on the route of the proposed electricity interconnector with regard to *(a)* problems with the British Gas pipeline and *(b)* the recent report by the British Geological Survey on explosions around Beaufort's dyke; and if he will make a statement. [8326]

Mr. Soames: Future marine engineering work may proceed only once those proposing the work have shown that a thorough environmental survey, including risk analysis, has been conducted and have satisfied the responsible Government Departments and other authorities accordingly. My Department is consulted as necessary as part of this process.

Royal Observer Corps

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what public commendation or recognition his Department has given in respect of the Royal Observer Corps; and if he will make a statement. [8452]

Mr. Soames: On 8 December 1995, to commemorate the stand-down of the remaining element of the Royal Observer Corps, invited guests, officers and other ranks attended a ceremony at the Royal Air Force college, Cranwell to lodge the Royal Observer Corps banner in college hall. To mark this occasion, I wrote formally to the commandant of the Royal Observer Corps paying tribute to the men and women of the corps who have given so much to their sovereign and to their country. Throughout they have carried out their duties with honour and dedication.

Low Flying

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the applicability of EU directives to compensation arrangements for pain, suffering and loss of amenity arising from military low flying over inhabited areas of Great Britain. [8240]

Mr. Soames: We are unaware of any relevant new or impending EU directives having a bearing on the present compensation arrangements arising from military low flying.

Gulf War

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what reports he has received and what research he has commissioned about the use of chemical or biological weapons by the Iraqis during the Gulf war and the effect of such weapons on British service men. [9063]

Mr. Soames: There was no evidence of any use of chemical or biological weapons during the Gulf war. Scientific and medical investigations have since confirmed that there is also no evidence that British service men have suffered from any effects which could be attributed to the use of chemical or biological weapons.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what occasions United Kingdom authorities were consulted before the United States of America used depleted weapons in the Gulf war; and if he will make a statement. [9030]

Mr. Soames: There were no such consultations nor was there a need for them. Depleted uranium ammunition is a standard part of the inventory of both UK and US armed forces.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the use of depleted uranium in the Gulf war; what assessment has been made by his Department of the longer-term consequences of its use with particular reference to United Kingdom military personnel subject; what plans he has to develop depleted uranium as a weapon for the armed forces; and if he will make a statement. [9029]

Mr. Soames: The British armed forces are equipped with two kinds of ammunition containing depleted uranium, DU: 120 mm tank ammunition, some small quantities of which were fired by Challenger tanks during the Gulf conflict; and 20 mm ammunition for the Royal Navy's Vulcan phalanx point defence system which, apart from some rounds fired for proving purposes, was not used in the Gulf.

There is no evidence that members of the British forces were exposed to harmful levels of radiation. My Department has, however, run a programme of reassurance monitoring for personnel who were concerned that they may have been exposed to DU. This monitoring has shown no detectable DU contamination of any individual.

Stocks of an anti-tank round, charm 1, which utilises a depleted uranium penetrator, are available for use by Challenger 1 tanks. Development of the charm 3 round for Challenger 2 tanks, which will also use depleted uranium, will be completed by the end of 1996. Stocks of DU ammunition for the phalanx weapons system are available for use by the Royal Navy. There are no other current plans to purchase further naval weapons systems which employ DU.

Munitions Dumping

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will hold an inquiry into the condition of munitions deposited in deep water, as marked on the relevant charts, just south of the inner sound of Raasay; and if he will make a statement; [9189]

(2) what representations he has received in respect of sea bed munition dumping, as marked on the relevant charts, in the vicinity of the inner sound of Raasay; and if he will make a statement. [9188]

Mr. Soames: My Department has no plans to hold an inquiry. Current scientific advice indicates that dump sites present no significant risk to human health or the marine environment if left undisturbed. My Department has no record of any representations about the inner sound of Raasay munition dumping ground.

Merchant Vessels

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many merchant vessels have been chartered by his Department for exercises and military support operations in 1995; and how many of these were under the British flag. [9495]

Mr. Soames: Some 91 merchant vessels have been chartered for exercises and military support operations in 1995, of which 17 were under the British flag.

Trident (Nuclear Incidents)

Mrs Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what emergency berths exist in Scotland for Trident in the event of a nuclear reactor or weapon incident; and where they are situated. [9410]

Mr. Soames: No berths are designated specifically for emergency use. The normal operating berths for Trident submarines are at the Clyde submarine base, Faslane and at the royal naval armaments depot, Coulport.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements exist for the safety of *(a)* military and *(b)* civilian populations in the event of a nuclear leak from Trident; and if he will make a statement. [9411]

Mr. Soames: In the event of an accident involving any defence nuclear material in the UK, the Ministry of Defence nuclear accident response organisation would work in conjunction with the appropriate civil agencies to ensure an effective response to safeguard the public and departmental employees. Where appropriate, information has been issued by the MOD under the provisions of the Public Information for Radiation Emergencies Regulations 1992; public safety schemes exist in respect of all UK berths used by nuclear-powered submarines; and guidance on appropriate protective measures in the event of an accident during the transportation of nuclear weapons has been issued to local authorities and the emergency services. These arrangements were described on pages 39 and 40 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1995".

Stolen and Lost Property

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 9 January, *Official Report,*

column *102*, about stolen and lost property *(a)* how many weapons were lost or missing in each period and service and *(b)* what proportion of (i) all losses and (ii) weapon loss occurred in Northern Ireland. [9723]

Mr. Soames: Figures for weapons reported as lost or missing in each period and service could be provided only at disproportionate cost. A central register detailing losses to this level of information is not held.

Details of losses were given in my answer to the hon. Member on 9 January, *Official Report*, column *102*. The proportion of those losses occurring in Northern Ireland for each of the last five years is:

	Per cent.
1990–91	3.2
1991–92	1.7
1992–93	1.6
1993–94	2.6
1994–95	[1]5.2

[1]The figure for 1994–95 does not take into account figures for Germany for which returns are not yet available.

Gulf War Syndrome

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* the dates on which, *(b)* the locations where and *(c)* the units which during the Gulf war were ordered to take nerve agent pre-treatment set tablets because of an assessed threat of possible chemical agent attack. [9619]

Mr. Soames: During the conduct of Operation Granby, which ran from 9 August 1990 to 11 April 1991, the assessed threat of chemical weapon attack in the theatre of operations was regarded as sufficiently high to necessitate the issuing of orders for nerve agent pre-treatment, set tablets to be taken during the period from 18 January 1991, following the start of the air war, to 1 March 1991, when hostilities ceased. The orders applied to all units and personnel in, or deploying into, theatre.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many volunteer reservists served with the Royal Air Force in the Gulf war; and how many of them have notified his Department that they are suffering from the condition known as Gulf war syndrome. [9620]

Mr. Soames: Records indicate that a total of 286 Royal Auxiliary Air Force and Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve personnel served with the Royal Air Force during Operation Granby, of whom approximately 140 deployed to the Gulf theatre. Of those Gulf veterans who have notified my Department of health concerns which they attribute to service in the Gulf, four individuals have indicated that they served with the RAF as reservists.

Delegated Legislation

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the powers to make statutory instruments exercisable by the Secretary of State under primary legislation enacted since 1979 are subject to *(a)* the negative and *(b)* the affirmative resolution procedure. [9595]

Mr. Soames: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ukrainian Personnel

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what are the arrangements that have been made to assist the retraining of Ukrainian military personnel; and if he will make a statement; [9407]

(2) what assistance is being provided for the resettlement of Ukrainian armed forces; and if he will make a statement. [9408]

Mr. Soames: In the course of an increasingly warm bilateral relationship with Ukraine, representatives of the Ukrainian MOD, the defence and security committee of the Supreme Council and the ex-servicemen's committee have been briefed on the UK system for retraining and resettling retired military personnel. These discussions are expected to continue. I also understand that assistance in this area has been provided by the FCO's know-how fund, by the European Union technical aid to the Commonwealth of Independent States—TACIS—programme, by the Soros Foundation's international renaissance foundation and by the German Government.

Married Quarters (Longhoughton)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the sale of surplus married quarters in Longhoughton, Northumberland, to a housing association was completed; and if he will name the housing association involved. [7706]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer Tuesday 9 January 1996]:* The 21 surplus married quarters at Longhoughton, Northumberland were offered for sale by limited tender to four housing associations in December 1995. No acceptable offer was received and it has therefore been decided to include these properties in those being offered for transfer to the private sector.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Greenpark Hospital Trust

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the exact amount of debt accrued by the Green Park Hospital HSS Healthcare trust as of 12 December 1995 to its creditors; and if he will list the creditors indicating the amounts owing to each. [8225]

Mr. Moss: The information is not available in the exact form requested. As at 31 December 1995, the Green Park Hospital HSS Healthcare trust had trade creditors of £1.9 million. This total comprises individual amounts in respect of some 600 creditors. For reasons of commercial confidentiality, it is not appropriate to list amounts owed to individual creditors.

Mr. Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what amount of debt a self-regulatory trust is allowed to accrue at any stage during its fiscal year; and if he will indicate the figure in respect of Green Park Hospital HCC Healthcare trust. [8226]

Mr. Moss: A health and social services trust has three key financial duties. These are (1) to break even taking one year with another; (2) to make a 6 per cent. return on its relevant net assets; (3) to operate within its existing external financing limit. A trust is required to operate sound financial systems to control its income and expenditure and satisfy the duties set out in points (1) to (3). The EFL limits a trust's access to all sources of external finance, including the accumulation of trade creditors. For the year 1995–96, the Green Park Hospital HSS Healthcare trust's current EFL is £1,676,000. It should be noted that the EFL is a composite figure which takes account of the overall financial position of trust including debtor, creditor, stock and cash balances. The Green Park Hospital HSS Healthcare trust forecasts to stay within its EFL in 1995–96.

Colleges of Nursing

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many colleges of nursing there are in Northern Ireland; how many students attend each college of nursing *(a)* in total and *(b)* from the Republic of Ireland; what is the value of the bursary paid to a student from the Republic of Ireland; to what extent this bursary is means-tested; and what is the estimated cost to public funds for the annual expenditure for Republic of Ireland students. [8227]

Mr. Moss: The information is as follows:

There are six Colleges of Nursing and Midwifery in Northern Ireland

Training Institution	*Number of students in training*	*Number of students from ROI*[1]
Eastern Area College—Northside	429	82
Eastern Area College—Southside	397	46
Northern Area College of Nursing	371	26
Southern Area College of Nursing	257	63
Western Area College of Nursing	232	89
NI College of Midwifery	54	6
Totals	1,740	312

Figures as at 31 December 1995.
[1] Republic of Ireland.

The amount of bursary payable to students is not dependent on their Country of Origin and information on bursaries in payment is therefore not held by Country of Origin.
Bursaries are not means tested.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Northern Ireland applicants were refused places in 1995 in the colleges of nursing; and what priority is accorded to students from the Republic of Ireland over students from Northern Ireland in the provision of places. [8228]

Mr. Moss: Experience has shown that, on average, there are approximately 10 applicants for each student place.

No priority is accorded to students from the Republic of Ireland as all places are awarded on a merit basis.

Royal Ulster Constabulary (Expenditure)

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what is the projected expenditure for RUC operational policing in 1996; [8472]

(2) what was the *(a)* projected and *(b)* actual expenditure on RUC operational policing in 1995. [8471]

Sir John Wheeler: The information is not held in the form requested; police budgets are calculated by financial, not calendar, year. The approved police authority grant for the 1996–97 financial year will be £584 million.

The projected expenditure—the approved grant to the Police Authority for Northern Ireland for the 1995–96 financial year—was £609.2 million. I will write to the hon. Member once the actual expenditure for 1995–96 is known in April 1996. In both cases, the provision covers all RUC and PANI costs.

Fair Employment Acts (Education)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were *(a)* the total number and *(b)* the annual salary payments of staff in the category of school teachers exempted from the anti-discrimination rules of the fair employment Acts; and if he will break down the figures by education board or council for Catholic maintained schools, and by controlled or maintained schools. [8495]

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is as follows:

	Controlled/non-Catholic maintained		*Catholic maintained*		*Total*	
	Numbers	*£ million*	*Numbers*	*£ million*	*Numbers*	*£ million*
Belfast Education and Library Board	1,382	33.3	1,573	37.3	2,955	70.6
North Eastern Education and Library Board	2,593	60.6	1,122	27.4	3,715	88.0
South Eastern Education and Library Board	2,241	54.7	914	22.0	3,155	76.7
Southern Education and Library Board	1,646	38.5	2,153	50.4	3,799	88.9
Western Education and Library Board	1,130	27.6	2,038	48.1	3,168	75.7
Voluntary grammar/grant-maintained integrated	—	—	—	—	3,290	72.2

Grant Aid

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much grant aid, and from which sources, has been allocated to each of the four Belfast constituencies in the past 10 years. [8010]

Mr. Ancram: The following grant aid has been committed by the Industrial Development Board under selective financial assistance to client companies in each of the four Belfast constituencies in the last 10 years.

Belfast North: £2,969,000

Belfast South: £41,905,000

Belfast East: £9,348,000

Belfast West: £67,937,000.

The figures exclude assistance under the privatisation agreements with Harland and Wolff and Shorts in 1989 which amounted to £205 million and £115 million respectively.

Information on schemes operated by IDB trade and export division is not recorded in a way in which it could be broken down into constituencies. The information is not therefore available.

The Local Enterprise Development Unit has committed the following grant aid in the period from 1 April 1988. Information prior to this date would be available only at disproportionate cost.

Belfast North: £9,925,000

Belfast South: £10,783,000

Belfast East: £7,648,000

Belfast West: £14,137,000.

Ulster Museum

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish the attendance figures for 1995 reported by the Ulster museum, including its outstations, with the percentage increase or decrease on the attendance figures for 1994. [9012]

Mr. Ancram: In 1995, a total of 337,829 people visited the Ulster museum and the Armagh county museum—an increase of 25.57 per cent. on the attendance figure for 1994.

Delegated Legislation

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of the powers to make statutory instruments exercisable by the Secretary of State under primary legislation enacted since 1979 are subject to *(a)* the negative and *(b)* the affirmative resolution procedure. [9586]

Sir John Wheeler: This information is not held centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Public Spending

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the change in Government spending in Northern Ireland in the law, order and protective services budget in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97 and *(c)* 1997–98; and if he will indicate the sums of money by which other areas of public spending will benefit from these savings in each of these years. [8222]

Sir John Wheeler: The information is as follows:

£ million

	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
1993 Public Expenditure Survey Outcome	944	963	963
1995 Public Expenditure Survey Outcome	[1]905	858	858

[1] Latest estimated outturn.

The fact that my right hon. and learned Friend has been able to reallocate these savings within the Northern Ireland block to social and economic programmes has clearly been beneficial. As all savings within the block are combined and used to meet pressures, it is not possible to be precise about where the savings have been allocated.

Further information was given by my right hon. and learned Friend in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) on 11 December 1995, *Official Report*, columns *541–42*.

Prisoners (Home Leave)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many *(a)* republican and *(b)* loyalist paramilitary prisoners were granted home leave over Christmas; and how many of each persuasion failed to return; [8483]

(2) how many *(a)* republican and *(b)* loyalist paramilitary prisoners were not granted home leave over Christmas. [8484]

Sir John Wheeler: Responsibility for this subject has been delegated to the Northern Ireland Prison Service under its chief executive, Mr. Alan Shannon. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. D. Shannon to Mr. Tony Worthington, dated 16 January 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply to the two Parliamentary Questions you listed relating to the numbers of paramilitary prisoners who were granted/refused Home Leave over the Christmas period.

Of those prisoners who are assumed to have paramilitary associations, 125 were eligible to apply for leave under the 1995 Christmas Home Leave Scheme. All of these prisoners were granted 7 days leave from 22-29 December and all returned to prison on 29 December 1995.

The breakdown was:

68 prisoners with Republican affiliations

57 prisoners with Loyalist affiliations

No such prisoner who was eligible to apply under the 1995 Scheme was refused Christmas Home Leave.

I hope this information is helpful.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Ukraine

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what involvement the United Kingdom has in Ukrainian defence conversion projects; and if he will make a statement. [9409]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Her Majesty's Government support the conversion of the Ukrainian military industrial complex through multilateral programmes such as the

technical aid to the Commonwealth of Independent States—TACIS—programme of the European Union. A total of 5 million ecu has been budgeted to three defence conversion projects in Ukraine. In the 1992 budget, 1 million ecu was allocated to the setting up of an advisory company which was to assist military enterprises in the Kharkov area with defence conversion. Another 1 million ecu has been allocated to six companies from the MIC which are now producing agricultural equipment.

In the 1993 financial year, 3 million ecu was allocated to another six companies from the MIC.

British companies from the private sector are also active in this field. For example, a British-Ukrainian joint venture recently signed a contract with the Ukrainian Government for the conversion of a military shipyard to civilian use.

A feasibility study for this project received support from the UK know-how fund.

Delegated Legislation

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many of the powers to make statutory instruments exercisable by the Secretary of State under primary legislation enacted since 1979 are subject to *(a)* the negative and *(b)* the affirmative resolution procedure. [9584]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has responsibility for making statutory instruments which are subject to the negative resolution procedure under the Southern Rhodesia Act 1979, the Antarctic Act 1994 and the Hong Kong Act 1985. He has responsibility for making statutory instruments which are subject to the affirmative resolution procedure under the Crown Agents Act 1979, the Zimbabwe Act 1979, the Overseas Development and Co-operation Act 1980 and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency Act 1988.

SCOTLAND

Consultants

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those *(a)* consultants, *(b)* outside organisations and *(c)* individuals employed by his Department each year since 1990, indicating the purposes of their employment and the total payments made to them. [3956]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The total number of Scottish Office staff can be found in the civil service staff in post summary tables which have been placed in the Library. Staff costs are published in the Scottish Office departmental report. It is not possible to provide the other information without disproportionate cost.

Scottish Homes

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much Scottish Homes spent in each of the last three years on publicity and promotions. [7743]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The information is as follows:

1992–93: £1.142 million

1993–94: £1.149 million

1994–95: £0.990 million.

Executive Agencies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if answers sent to hon. Members in reply to parliamentary questions by the head of executive agencies in his Department are *(a)* seen, *(b)* approved and *(c)* amended by him before they are sent; and if he will identify such letters to which amendments by him have been made in 1994–95. [7824]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Parliamentary questions are passed to the head of an executive agency for reply when the matter is one delegated to the chief executive under the terms of the agency framework document. My right hon. Friend may, on occasion, specifically ask to see a copy of the reply before it is sent, but would not normally intervene in operational matters. To date, my right hon. Friend has not asked to see before issue a copy of any of the answers given by chief executives.

Severe Weather Conditions

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people in Glasgow have been made temporarily homeless due to the recent severe weather conditions. [8941]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Information obtained from Glasgow district council suggests that around 1,000 people had to be placed in temporary accommodation following the recent severe weather. This figure does not include those who managed to find temporary accommodation with friends and relatives.

Mr. Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the recent severe weather in Scotland. [8938]

Mr. Kynoch: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend gave to the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) on 10 January, *Official Report*, columns *235–38*.

Mr. Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will visit those areas of Glasgow his Department estimates to be worst affected by the recent severe weather conditions. [8958]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* On 5 January, my right hon. Friend visited the Strathclyde regional council water department headquarters and heard at first hand from the staff who had worked long and hard over the holiday period to maintain services. He learnt about the large numbers of properties which were affected by burst pipes and the efforts made to reduce the ensuring damage. I and my colleagues have paid similar visits in other parts of Scotland and we are all aware of the tremendous efforts made by the staff of the water authorities. Benefits Agency staff have also done very well in dealing with urgent cases of hardship. My right hon. Friend has established a working party to report on the lessons to be learnt from what was, by any standards, an extraordinary series of events.

Creagan Bridge

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) who he has consulted on the subject of a Creagan road bridge; and what plans he has to further consultations; [8544]

(2) what estimate he has made of the cost of the construction of the Creagan bridge; [8585]

(3) what is the timetable for the construction of the Creagan bridge; and if he will make a statement; [8542]

(4) what public funds will be made available for the construction of the Creagan bridge. [8543]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We have consulted extensively on plans for the Creagan bridge with statutory consultees in line with schedule 1 to the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984. All directly affected landowners were visited by representatives from the National Roads Directorate. Plans were available for inspection locally at the time the draft road orders were published. On 1 May 1992, a compulsory purchase order was published under the Acquisition of Land (Authorisation Procedure) Scotland Act 1947 and on 5 February 1993 main line and side road orders were confirmed. Arrangements are currently being made for a public local inquiry to consider one unwithdrawn objection from a local landowner to the compulsory purchase order.

The cost of the scheme is currently estimated at £6.22 million. Given a satisfactory outcome at the public inquiry, and the continuing availability of resources, it is anticipated that construction will start in 1997–98, as a publicly funded project.

Flood Prevention (Strathclyde)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what response he has given *(a)* in writing or *(b)* verbally to Strathclyde regional council in respect of capital projects concerned with flood prevention. [8485]

Mr. Kynoch: No recent approaches have been made by Strathclyde regional council to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in respect of capital projects concerned with flood prevention. Indeed, no approaches have been made since the Brock burn/leven water flood prevention scheme was confirmed in 1993. This scheme was completed in late 1994 and grant assistance at 50 per cent. of eligible costs has been paid.

However, I am aware that Strathclyde has now commissioned flood studies of some of the areas affected in December 1994. This will assist the unitary councils in determining their flood prevention strategies. I welcome this initiative by Strathclyde regional council.

Munitions Dumping

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will hold an inquiry into the condition of munitions deposited in deep water, as marked on the relevant charts, just south of the inner sound of Raasay; and if he will make a statement. [9186]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The Scottish Office has no plans to hold an inquiry.

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received in respect of sea bed munition dumping, as marked on the relevant charts, in the vicinity of the inner sound of Raasay; and if he will make a statement. [9187]

Mr. Robertson: No representations have been received by the Scottish Office in respect of munition dumping in that vicinity.

Skye Bridge Toll

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the latest available total number of cases referred to the local procurator fiscal in respect of non-payment of the Skye bridge toll; when he expects the procurator fiscal to report further; if such alleged offences will be subject to civil or criminal proceedings; and if he will make a statement. [8677]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The latest available figures relating to non-payment of the Skye bridge toll in contravention of section 38(1) of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 are as follows:

> There have been 466 instances of non-payment which have been reported to the procurator fiscal; these instances involve 186 separate individuals. The procurator fiscal has been instructed by the Lord Advocate to institute criminal proceedings in respect of all instances where there is a sufficiency of evidence and the charges are now in course of preparation. The procurator fiscal will report the results of these proceedings to the Crown Office.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what *(a)* guidelines and *(b)* other advice has been issued by his Department to (i) NHS bodies and (ii) other organisations regarding the extension of the private finance initiative to the operation of health services. [9081]

Lord James Douglas Hamilton *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* The "Private Finance Guide", issued to the NHS in Scotland, is the main source of guidance on PFI. In it, it is stated that the NHS would

> "manage and provide all the core health services, while the private sector partner could provide a fully serviced building. The precise division of responsibilities between the Trust and its private partner would need to be determined on the basis of whatever arrangement would offer best value for money and least risk".

No other guidelines have been issued on this subject. It is for trusts and boards to make this decision. The model so far has been that trusts will continue to operate core health services, with the private sector operating support services.

Beaufort's Dyke

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 14 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *817*, if he will now agree to extend the nature and coverage of the follow-up survey of Beaufort's dyke *(a)* to include more sophisticated sonar and laser equipment and *(b)* to cover a wider geographic area, including depths below 30 m; and if he will make a statement. [8576]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* Full particulars of the further Government survey work announced at a press conference on 8 January in Aberdeen will be made available in due course.

Prisons (Education)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his policy towards education in Scottish prisons. [9276]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* As a recognised regime activity, education for prisoners is provided on the basis of need subject to prisoners' willingness to participate in what is a voluntary activity and resources being available. Courses range from literary and numeracy to degree level with a sizeable proportion focusing on recognised qualifications such as the Scottish Vocational Education Council modules to help prisoners find employment and to continue with their studies on release.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list those prisons in Scotland which provide educational courses leading to recognised qualifications for prisoners; [9273]

(2) if he will estimate the level of public expenditure that has been devoted to education in Scottish prisons over the last five years and the levels projected to be spent over the next three years; [9274]

(3) how many prisoners in Scottish jails are currently studying on courses leading to educational qualifications; [9275]

(4) what studies his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated to investigate the effect of education in Scottish jails on recidivism rates; [9277]

(5) what plans he has to set up a Scottish prison education trust to assist in promoting education in Scottish prisons; [9278]

(6) what estimate he has made of the proportion of prisoners in Scottish prisons who would be willing to undertake education while serving prison sentences if appropriate courses were available. [9279]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* The subjects of the questions relate to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from D. A. Stewart to Mr. Archy Kirkwood, dated 16 January 1996:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked the Chief Executive to reply to your questions about listing those prisons which provide educational courses leading to recognised qualifications for prisoners, the level of public expenditure devoted to education in prisons, the number of prisoners currently studying on courses leading to educational qualifications, what studies have been carried out to investigate the effect of education on recidivism rates, what plans there are to set up a Scottish Prison Education Trust and what estimate has been made of the proportion of prisoners who would be willing to undertake education if appropriate courses were available. In absence of the Chief Executive form the office, I am replying on his behalf.

All prison establishments in Scotland provide educational courses leading to recognised qualification for prisoners save, for the present, the recently formed Peterhead Unit and National Induction Centre at Shotts and Longriggend Remand Unit where the average length of stay for those on remand is relatively short.

Expenditure on education for prisoners for each of the four years to 31 March 1995 together with the budget for the current financial year is as follows:

Year	*£000*
1991–92	1,273
1992–93	[1]1,674
1993–94	1,545
1994–95	1,657
1995–96 Budget	1,678

[1] Payment pattern skewed by incorporation of colleges of further education on 1 April 1993.

Budget allocations for establishments for 1996–97 (including budgets for education) are still in the process of being agreed. Budgets for 1997–98 and 1998–99 will be set in due course.

In terms of the number of prisoners currently studying on courses leading to educational qualifications a recent snapshot showed that there are approximately 1,100 prisoners in this category.

On the topic of education and recidivism rates, no specific research studies have been undertaken to investigate the effects of education on recidivism. However, the recent computerisation of the system of prisoner records in Scotland will provide an opportunity, in future years, to examine the impact of a range of prisoner programmes, including education on recidivism.

The Scottish Prison Service has no plans to set up a Scottish Prison Education Trust.

An estimate of the proportion of prisoners willing to undertake education is not held centrally. Each establishment keeps under review the appropriate mix of regime activities, including education, in the light of the needs of prisoners.

HEALTH

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

9. **Dame Jill Knight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the annual saving to the NHS arising from compulsory competitive tendering. [7500]

Mr. Horam: As a result of market testing, it is estimated that since 1983 the national health service has saved a total in excess of £1 billion. The improved value for money achieved has released additional resources for direct patient care.

Paediatric Beds

10. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the availability of paediatric beds. [7501]

Mr. Bowis: Local authorities and trusts are best placed to determine the level and range of paediatric care that is needed by their local population. The development of day care services for children has reduced the demand for beds while increasing the number treated.

General Practitioner Fundholding

11. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evaluation has been made of the results of the general practitioner fundholding initiative. [7502]

Mr. Malone: Independent evaluation of general practitioner fundholding has supported its development and many commentators, including the National Audit Office, have called for the benefits to be extended as widely as possible.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department maintains on the use of general practice fundholders' savings *(a)* by general practitioner fundholding practices and *(b)* by regional health authorities. [9034]

Mr. Malone: The Department receives information from each family health services authority each year on total savings spent by general practitioner fundholders, excluding amounts used to supplement their fundholding budgets.

Monitoring of the detailed use of savings is a local responsibility. Information is not collected centrally.

Accident and Emergency Services (London)

12. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received about accident and emergency services in London. [7503]

Mr. Malone: Over the last three months, we have received a total of 18 letters from hon. Members and others.

National Health Service Facilities (Sales)

14. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the British Medical Association to discuss the purchasing by the private sector of NHS facilities. [7505]

Mr. Malone: My right hon. Friend regularly meets representatives of the medical profession and discussions cover a wide variety of topics.

Intensive Care Paediatric Beds

15. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the present occupancy rate of intensive care paediatric beds. [7506]

Mr. Bowis: Because information on bed occupancy was not available centrally, the national health service executive arranged for Sheffield Children's hospital to co-ordinate the monitoring of occupancy and demand for beds at the 17 paediatric intensive care units in England for the period to 31 March.

Edgware General Hospital

16. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further representations on the future of Edgware general hospital he has received after the meeting on Wednesday 13 December. [7507]

Mr. Malone: My right hon. Friend has received just over 200 representations, most of which were pre-printed postcards.

Regional Health Authorities

17. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what will be the annual saving resulting from the abolition of regional health authorities. [7508]

Mr. Malone: By 1997–98, total annual savings from the abolition of regional health authorities are expected to be around £100 million. These substantial savings will be retained by the national health service and reinvested in patient care.

Emergency Admission Beds

18. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he collects centrally concerning the non-availability of beds for emergency admissions in the areas of each district health authority. [7509]

Mr. Horam: Health authorities and national health service trusts should work together to plan and ensure that facilities are available to meet demand. The new patients charter standard on emergency admissions is focusing attention on the importance of this area of work. The NHS executive is looking at ways of identifying best practice and ensuring that it is disseminated across the service.

Acute and Medical Emergency Beds (Birmingham)

19. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent consultations he has had with West Midlands regional health authority over the provision of acute and medical emergency beds in hospitals in the city of Birmingham. [7510]

Mr. Horam: I am kept regularly informed of emergency services provision in the west midlands and am aware that accident and emergency facilities across Birmingham continue to be made a priority.

Trust Amalgamations (Isle of Wight)

20. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to announce the amalgamation of the health and hospital trusts on the Isle of Wight. [7511]

Mr. Horam: We have not received a proposal from the Isle of Wight Community Healthcare NHS trust or St. Mary's Hospital NHS trust to amalgamate.

District Health Authorities (Purchasing Policy)

21. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the purchasing policies of district health authorities. [7512]

27. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what monitoring he has undertaken of the purchasing policies of district health authorities. [7518]

Mr. Malone: Local information about purchasing plans is not collected centrally.

Private Finance Initiative

22. **Sir Thomas Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many private finance initiative schemes he *(a)* has agreed and *(b)* is considering. [7513]

Mr. Horam: To ensure that national health service capital projects meet NHS needs as cost-effectively as possible, the option of using private finance, under the Government's private finance initiative, must be considered for every potential capital project. Formulation of plans for projects to meet local needs is the responsibility of NHS trusts and health authorities. So far, 45 PFI schemes have been approved by the NHS

executive, with a total capital value of over £160 million. Information on the number of PFI schemes being considered is not available centrally.

Hospital Porters

23. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the role of hospital porters. [7514]

Mr. Malone: The role of hospital porters is typically to transport patients between wards and departments and to move records, equipment and supplies from storage to where they are needed.

Intensive Care Beds

24. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the availability of staff for intensive care beds. [7515]

Mr. Horam: This is a matter for local health authorities and national health service trusts, which are best placed to determine the needs of their local populations. They have been asked to examine and review local intensive care provision in the light of the report on intensive care provision in England 1993–94.

Community Care

25. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the Association of Directors of Social Services to discuss community care. [7516]

Mr. Bowis: I meet members and officers of the Association of Directors of Social Services on numerous occasions throughout the year and discuss a range of issues with them, including issues related to community care.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what current instructions he has issued to local health authorities to ensure that, prior to patients being released from health care into community care, adequate inquiries are made to ascertain if this is practicable; and if he will make a statement. [9117]

Mr. Bowis: In the case of those treated in hospital for mental disorder, our guidance emphasises that no patient should be discharged unless and until those responsible are satisfied that he or she can live safely in the community, and that adequate arrangements have been made for the patient's treatment supervision, support and care.

For patients with continuing health and social care needs, recent guidance stresses the need for clear procedures and responsibility for taking decisions about discharge and effective collaboration between key health and social service professionals.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what monitoring he has undertaken of community care provision; and if he will make a statement on its findings. [7436]

Mr. Bowis: Since April 1993, we have had a very full monitoring programme for community care in order to ensure that implementation stayed on track. In addition, the social services inspectorate carries out regular inspections, statistics are regularly collected and published and longer-term research is in hand to evaluate progress.

Our monitoring has shown that the implementation of community care has been a good story for vulnerable people, who have already benefited greatly from the new arrangements. Firm foundations have been laid and steady progress continues to be made.

Community care is, however, a long-term programme and work remains to be done before the full benefits are delivered in all areas. Our programme for development set out in the document "Building Partnerships for Success" will help encourage this further development. As the Audit Commission has pointed out, local authorities need good financial control of their social services budgets. Some could do better if greater use were made of independent sector provision.

Alcohol-related Services

26. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the NHS will spend this year on alcohol-related services. [7517]

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) on 19 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *1148*.

Care Guidelines (Elderly People)

28. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines he has issued about the provision of care to elderly people living in the community. [7519]

Mr. Bowis: Policy and practice guidance has been issued by the Department to all local authorities in relation to their community care responsibilities, in "Community Care in the Next Decade and Beyond", published in November 1990. Practice guidance on "Care Management and Assessment" was issued in 1991. In addition, the social services inspectorate has produced reports relating to care for elderly people. Guidance was issued in February 1995 on national health service responsibilities for meeting continuing health care needs.

Copies of the documents are available in the Library.

Darenth Park General Hospital

29. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in respect of the new general hospital at Darenth park for the Dartford and Gravesham NHS trust. [7520]

Mr. Horam: The trust has shortlisted four consortia which have been invited to submit their detailed proposals for the new general hospital by the end of the month.

Breast Cancer

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women over the age of 65 years *(a)* developed

breast cancer and *(b)* died from breast cancer in each region in each of the last four years. [8480]

Mr. Horam: The number of women aged 65 years and over who have died from breast cancer in each region in each of the last four years for which data are available is as follows:

Deaths from breast cancer (ICD[1] 174) to women aged 65 and over

England and Wales

	1991	*1992*	*[2]1993*	*[2]1994*
Northern RHA	493	475	451	423
Yorkshire RHA	576	527	592	523
Trent RHA	799	805	748	764
East Anglian RHA	376	410	380	433
North-West Thames RHA	568	501	459	399
North-East Thames RHA	655	613	587	552
South-East Thames RHA	715	687	692	545
South-West Thames RHA	596	576	520	638
Wessex RHA	575	570	560	523
Oxford RHA	383	398	305	338
South Western RHA	654	662	615	622
West Midlands RHA	892	860	799	795
Mersey RHA	363	405	353	350
North Western RHA	662	614	586	589
Wales	495	529	512	492
England and Wales	8,802	8,632	8,159	7,986

Notes:
[1] International Classification of Diseases 9th Revision.
[2] Provisional data.

The number of women aged 65 years and over who have been diagnosed as having breast cancer in each region in each of the last four years for which data are available is as follows.

Incidence of breast cancer (ICD9 174) in women aged 65 and over

England and Wales

	1989	*1990*	*[1]1991*	*[2]1992*
Northern RHA	626	656	669	647
Yorkshire RHA	968	840	849	771
Trent RHA	982	1,135	1,128	1,177
East Anglian RHA	583	571	597	509
North-West Thames RHA	840	933	889	912
North-East Thames RHA	1,070	1,002	996	1,023
South-East Thames RHA	1,061	1,065	1,034	1,102
South-West Thames RHA	926	820	821	848
Wessex RHA	975	907	921	993
Oxford RHA	580	596	587	639
South Western RHA	986	908	862	834
West Midlands RHA	1,362	1,364	1,335	1,326
Mersey RHA	617	619	613	600
North Western RHA	1,000	940	1,047	1,080
Wales	848	863	880	900
England and Wales	13,424	13,219	13,198	13,361

Notes:
[1] Incidence for Wales is an estimate.
[2] Incidences for all Thames RHAs, Mersey RHA and Wales are estimates.
Source:
Regional cancer registries and Welsh Office.

Long-term Care

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce a ring-fenced levy in order to finance the long-term care of the elderly; if he will include the payment from this levy of the costs of residential and nursing home care; and if he will make a statement. [9120]

Mr. Bowis: We have no plans to do so.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those trusts which have made more than a 6 per cent. rate of return on their assets in each year since their inception, indicating the rate of return achieved. [8714]

Mr. Horam: The information will be placed in the Library.

Reginald Dixon

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the prosecution of Reginald Dixon for illegally performing an abortion on Barbara Whiten; and whether, following this case he has any plans to introduce new guidelines or bring forward legislation to clarify patients' rights. [8704]

Mr. Horam: We have no plans to introduce legislation in this area. A patient has the right under common law to give or withhold consent prior to examination or treatment. However, in an emergency when a patient is not in a position to express her consent or refusal, a doctor may act without consent when he or she reasonably believes that it is in the best interests of the patient to do so. Guidance on consent for examination or treatment was issued to the national health service in 1990. I understand that the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists is considering the implications of the recent case for best professional practice.

Acute and Community Mental Health Services

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were seen by *(a)* acute and *(b)* community mental health services in each health authority in each of the last three years. [8716]

Mr. Bowis: The information is not available in the form requested. Information on the number of episodes of in-patient treatment under mental health specialists is published in "Ordinary and Day Case Admissions for England". Information on the number of initial contacts with community psychiatric nurses is published in "Patient Care in the Community, Community Psychiatric Nursing, Summary information for England". Both publications give the information by individual national health service providers, that is, trusts, directly managed units and specialist health authorities with summaries for regional office areas; the data are not available for health authorities. The publications for 1994–95 and for earlier years are available in the Library.

Carers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure early help is given to the carers of the elderly and disabled in accordance with the recommendations of the British Medical

Association's report on the subject; and if he will make a statement. [9129]

Mr. Bowis: Support for carers is one of our key community care priorities. It is not practicable to prescribe centrally the form which this support should take. It is the responsibility of health and local authorities to offer a suitable range of support, such as respite and home care, based on local needs. Case by case, the services and support provided should reflect the circumstances of individual users and carers.

Our current guidance to health and local authorities makes clear the importance of involving their carers in decisions made about service users. From April 1996, under the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995, carers who provide substantial care on a regular basis will have a right to their own assessment if they want it.

This year, we have included an additional £30 million in community care funding for the provision of respite and home care. Our monitoring shows that the extra £20 million made available in 1994–95 resulted in more day and respite care being provided to the benefit of carers.

Health Authority Standards

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that all NHS health authorities follow the best practice and highest standards which any one authority attains; if he will require that they regard the standards set out in his Department's guidance HSG(95)8 in February 1995 as the minimum acceptable standards; and if he will make a statement. [9153]

Mr. Bowis: Health authorities are expected to implement fully the requirements set out in HSG(95)8. The details of our arrangements to monitor the implementation of this guidance were set out in a letter to health authorities and local authorities which was issued on 17 August 1995. Copies of the letter are available in the Library.

Mental Health

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent on mental health in each health authority area in each of the last three years *(a)* in the acute sector and *(b)* in the community sector. [8715]

Mr. Bowis: The information is not available centrally.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which trusts have *(a)* informed the NHS executive or *(b)* been investigated in respect of their long-term financial viability. [8711]

Mr. Horam: The financial viability of all trusts is investigated before their establishment. Subsequently, this process is on-going as a part of each trust's annual business planning cycle. Trust plans are reviewed by the national health service executive.

Eye Tests (Walthamstow)

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in Walthamstow have had eye tests in each year since 1987. [8978]

Mr. Malone: The information is not available.

Local Authority Responsibilities

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the statutory responsibilities of local authorities to meet all needs assessed under the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990; and within what time scale services should be provided. [8722]

Mr. Bowis: Local authorities are required to assess people whom they think may require community care services, as defined under the NHS and Community Care Act 1990, and to decide on the basis of that assessment what, if any, services they should provide and how the needs of local people should be met.

A summary of local authorities' key powers and duties in community care under this Act and other legislation is set out in our document "A Framework for Local Community Care Charters in England", copies of which are available in the Library.

Local authorities are expected to publish their first local charters, based on this framework, in April 1996. These local charters will give people local information about the services and standards they can expect from their local social services departments, as well as from health and housing authorities.

Westcliffe Hospital, Stoke-on-Trent

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to approve the bid for PFI funding for the replacement long-stay beds at Westcliffe hospital, Stoke-on-Trent; and if he will make a statement. [9206]

Mr. Horam: The national health service executive expects to receive a full business case from North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS trust to replace the majority of the beds early in 1997. Approval to funding a capital investment using private finance would be conditional upon such an approach increasing cost-effectiveness and reducing risks for the NHS. The balance of the service will be the responsibility of the health authority, which will be seeking to place patients with local nursing homes.

Doncaster Health Authority

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the names and qualifications of the current chairman and non-executive directors of Doncaster health authority. [9902]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 30 October 1995, *Official Report*, columns *40–41*. Chairmen and non-executive members of health authorities are appointed for their personal qualities and skills and the contribution that they can make to the board.

Infant and Perinatal Mortality

Mr. Mark Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the change in *(a)* infant mortality rates and *(b)* perinatal mortality rates since 1979. [7498]

Mr. Horam: Infant and perinatal mortality rates have fallen, between 1979 and 1994, to the lowest levels ever recorded. Deaths in children under one year of age—the infant mortality rate—have fallen by half. Stillbirths and deaths of babies less than a week old—the perinatal rate—have fallen by nearly 40 per cent.

Drug Misuse Database

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who owns the data codes and structure of the drug misuse database. [9412]

Mr. Bowis: The ownership of such data codes and the structure of the drug misuse database is shared between the Department of Health and the university of Manchester.

Delegated Legislation

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the powers to make statutory instruments exercisable by the Secretary of State under primary legislation enacted since 1979 are subject to *(a)* the negative and *(b)* the affirmative resolution procedure. [9597]

Mr. Horam: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Straw: To ask the Attorney-General how many cases were discontinued by the Crown Prosecution Service; what was the total number of cases *(a)* received by magistrates courts and *(b)* finalised in magistrates courts; and how many cases were (i) received by the Crown Prosecution Service from the police, (ii) completed in the magistrates court, (iii) discontinued by the Crown Prosecution Service before or at the magistrates court hearing, (iv) committed to the Crown court by the magistrates court or (v) otherwise disposed of in each Crown Prosecution Service region in total in the first nine months of 1995–96. [8478]

The Attorney-General: The table shows the number of defendants whose case was dealt with by the 13 areas of the Crown Prosecution Service during the period of April to September 1995. The figures are not yet available for the quarter ending December 1995. The figures do not include the specialised casework undertaken by the headquarters of the service.

Magistrates' Courts cases April—September 1995

	Received	*Finalised*	*Of which, advice only*	*Completed in Magistrates' Courts*	*Discontinued*	*Committed to Crown Court*	*Other disposals*	*Other proceedings*
North	47,741	46,710	1,625	32,255	6,247	2,934	2,767	882
Yorkshire	42,041	42,335	1,052	28,072	6,299	2,975	3,582	355
Mersey/Lancashire	43,786	41,667	1,555	29,034	4,030	3,512	2,884	652
Humber	34,750	35,553	1,802	23,649	4,886	2,440	2,005	771
North-West	57,334	57,351	2,064	40,333	4,340	3,938	3,349	3,327
East Midlands	43,407	37,970	1,246	25,808	5,457	2,502	2,710	247
Wales	46,442	46,173	1,840	30,944	5,378	2,673	4,372	1,000
Midlands	52,012	52,054	2,565	34,674	5,404	3,779	4,472	1,160
Anglia	53,276	53,013	3,760	36,916	4,866	2,941	3,258	1,272
Severn/Thames	46,947	46,639	2,324	31,387	5,120	2,350	4,470	988
South-West	39,377	34,391	1,198	24,359	3,717	2,103	2,723	291
London	120,741	121,873	3,281	70,928	15,700	8,626	22,030	1,308
South-East	53,621	51,684	2,579	36,136	5,078	3,545	3,987	359
Total	681,475	667,413	26,891	444,495	76,522	44,318	62,609	12,612

Other disposals comprise committal hearings in which the defendant was discharged, cases where the defendant was bound over to keep the peace, instances where the defendant could not be found, and other cases where the prosecution could not proceed (e.g. through the death of the defendant).

Other proceedings comprise non-criminal proceedings, such as forfeiture hearings under Section 3 of the Obscene Publications Act.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Attorney-General when the internal review of the functions of the Crown Prosecution Service was established; what is its terms of reference; by whom it is being conducted; and when its conclusions will be reported to Parliament. [8460]

The Attorney-General: A number of important reviews of the work of the CPS were concluded last year. These included: a report on the merits and feasibility of merger between the CPS fraud divisions and the Serious Fraud Office; a prior options study in the context of the Government's initiative on next steps; and a senior management review. I reported to Parliament the outcome of the merger study and of the prior options study on 31 March 1995, *Official Report*, columns 1309–17, and 27 October 1995, *Official Report*, columns *820–21*, respectively. On the Senior management review, the CPS, in common with most other Departments, has carried out a senior management review following the White Papers on the civil service, continuity and change. The report of the senior management review was produced in August 1995 and has been made available to staff and others outside the CPS. Separately, as I announced on 4 December, *Official Report*, column 17, work continues on a range of measures to improve further the working relationships between the CPS and the police.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Attorney-General what action heads of his Department's executive agencies are taking to safeguard the provision of pre-retirement courses; and if he will make a statement. [9144]

The Attorney-General: The one agency for which I am responsible is the Government Property Lawyers. The GPL currently uses the pre-retirement courses provided by the Home Office, but keeps under review the possibility of using courses offered by other bodies.

Marchioness Accident

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Attorney-General what consideration the Crown Prosecution Service has given to initiating a prosecution in respect of the Marchioness accident since the inquest jury reached its verdict; and if he will make a statement. [9032]

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service has received in November and December 1995 from the coroner transcripts of the evidence given at the inquest. These are being studied. Once they have been considered, together with the pre-inquest evidence and the results of any additional inquiries which may be necessary, a decision will be made as to whether further criminal proceedings should be instituted.

WALES

Cancer Registration

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his current estimate of the date of completion of the review of cancer registration and the management and organisation of the Wales Cancer Registry; and if he will make a statement. [8467]

Mr. Hague: Proposals for the future management of the registry submitted by the Velindre NHS trust and the Welsh combined centres for public health are currently under consideration. I expect the management of the registry to transfer early in the next financial year.

Electronic Mail

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for the introduction of electronic mail for departmental press releases and for their transmission to the Library. [8465]

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on Tuesday 9 January 1996, *Official Report*, columns *109–10.*

Water and Sewage

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what consultations he has had with the chairman of the National Rivers Authority Wales area and the chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation in relation to the corporation's proposals for water uses in the impounded lake behind the Cardiff bay barrage and proposed reductions in sewage pumping stations and interceptor sewers at Leckwith moors, Brindley road, Ferry road and Park street; [8462]

(2) what consultations he has had with the chairman of Cardiff Bay development corporation and of the National Rivers Authority Wales on the water use strategy for the impounded lake behind the Cardiff bay barrage, in relation to the types of immersion sports, water contact water sports and non-contact water sports that will be permitted; and if he will make a statement. [8461]

Mr. Hague: None. This is an operational matter for the Cardiff Bay development corporation.

Community Health Councils

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received in relation to the membership of community health councils; if he will place a copy of all such representations in the Library; and if he will list the organisations or individuals who have made representations in favour of his proposed changes. [8466]

Mr. Hague: More than 150 responses to the consultation have been received, covering a wide spectrum of views. I will consider very carefully all comments before announcing what the next steps should be. At that stage, I will arrange for all the responses, apart from those where respondents have indicated that they would prefer their views not to be separately identified, to be placed in the Library of the House.

Literacy and Numeracy Centres

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has for literacy and numeracy centres in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [9069]

Mr. Richards: Plans for raising standards of literacy and numeracy in schools in Wales are set out in the published "Bright Future" programme. Every primary school is to set targets for improvements. Some £3 million is to be devoted to schemes in support during 1996–97.

Disadvantaged Pupils

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to give extra support in the schooling of children from disadvantaged homes; and if he will make a statement. [9065]

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend announced his provisional local government revenue proposals for 1996–97 in the House on 28 November, *Official Report,* column *600.* It is for individual local authorities to determine how the resources that are made available are allocated between services, including education, in the light of their statutory responsibilities and their perception of local needs and priorities.

Government Expenditure Report

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will seek payment from the central office of the Conservative party to recompense the Welsh Office for the time taken by civil servants on undertaking the recent report on the purported income and expenditure of all Government Departments in Wales, and in printing and publishing the report. [8636]

Mr. Hague: No. The report presents an objective assessment of Government expenditure on behalf of the population of Wales and revenue raised in Wales. The methodology used is clearly explained and open to scrutiny. I am satisfied that the report adds to public

understanding of fiscal issues relating to Wales and that its preparation and publication at public expense is fully justified.

Education Standards

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if the percentage of lessons consistently identified as poor by Ofsted included assessments of lessons given in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [9071]

Mr. Richards: No.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of failing schools in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [9070]

Mr. Richards: No such estimates are made. Whether a school is in need of special measures will depend on the findings of a full office of Her Majesty's chief inspector.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what cash he has earmarked to identify and improve failing schools; and if he will make a statement. [9072]

Mr. Richards: The costs of identifying failing schools are borne from within the overall budget for the office of Her Majesty's chief inspector. Those for improving failing schools will vary: they are not limited to a specifically earmarked sum.

Valleys Park

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to promote the establishment of a valleys park; and if he will make a statement. [8971]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Under the programme for the valleys, my right hon. Friend is keen to encourage projects which will help to improve the quality of the environment of the south Wales valleys. I understand an application has been submitted to the Millennium Commission for the development of a valleys park.

Electricity and Water Industries

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the implications for employment of the proposed takeover of Swalec by Welsh Water. [8637]

Mr. Hague: This is a matter for the companies concerned.

Homework Centres

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many homework centres he has established in each of the local education authorities of Wales; and if he will make a statement. [9064]

Mr. Richards: Establishment of such centres is a matter for individual schools. The "Bright Future" programme provides that each school in Wales should consider offering facilities for study after hours.

Adult Education

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy concerning adult education. [9199]

Mr. Richards: I refer the hon. Member to "People and Prosperity: An Agenda for Action in Wales". It is our policy in Wales to extend educational opportunity and choice, and improve standards, in all phases of education. This includes making good quality education accessible to adults to help them improve their qualifications and update their skills, and promoting a culture of lifelong learning.

Arts Centre

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he proposes to take to ensure that the establishment of a national concert hall, opera house and centre for the performing arts is established in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [9313]

Mr. Hague: I am sympathetic to the development of a national opera house in Wales, but decisions on the provision of arts facilities are a matter for the funding bodies concerned.

Millennium Fund

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what involvement his Department has in the process of deciding on millennium fund projects in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [9338]

Mr. Hague: The Welsh Office does not participate in decision making on millennium fund applications. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) on 23 October 1995, *Official Report*, column *474*.

InterCity

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will arrange as a matter of urgency to meet executives of InterCity rail services to discuss the robustness of the advertised InterCity through service from Holyhead to Euston. [9314]

Mr. Hague: The advertisement and provision of rail services are operational matters for the operator.

Welsh Language

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many Welsh language schemes have so far been agreed between the Welsh Language Board and public bodies in Wales covered by the provisions of the Welsh Language Act 1993. [9312]

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 19 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *1160*, and to the letter sent to him by the chief executive of the Welsh Language Board on the same day.

Government Expenditure

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will reconcile the apparent discrepancy for the expenditure on education in Wales, as shown in tables 3 and 4, for 1993–94, of his departmental report, "Government Expenditure and Revenue, Wales 1993–94", published on 8 January. [9514]

Mr. Richards: There is no discrepancy. The figures in table 3 relate to expenditure per head, as stated in the title. They show that expenditure per head on education was

about the same in England as in Wales. The figures in table 4 relate to total expenditure. They show that expenditure on education in Wales was a smaller proportion of identifiable general Government expenditure than in England.

Disabled People (Sport)

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his Department's policy in relation to the development of sports for disabled people. [9289]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Policy for the development of sports for disabled people is a matter for the Sports Council for Wales. In its strategy document "Changing Times, Changing Needs", the council reaffirmed its commitment to have particular regard to the needs of disabled people within its programmes. The council published the report "Willing and Able: The Provision of Sports Opportunity for Children with Disabilities" in March 1995 and is currently consulting on action programmes for the future.

Education Funding

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the adequacy of funding for the new unitary authority local education authorities in Wales to carry out their responsibilities from 1 April; and if he will make a statement. [9396]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend announced his provisional local government revenue settlement proposals for 1996–97 on 28 November, *Official Report*, column *600*. It is for individual local authorities to determine how the resources are allocated between functions, including education, in the light of their statutory responsibilities and their perception of local needs and priorities.

National Museum and Gallery of Wales

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the attendance figures for 1995 reported by the national museum and gallery of Wales, including its outstations, with the percentage increase or decrease on the attendance figures for 1994. [9013]

Mr. Richards: A total of 780,344 people visited the national museums and galleries of Wales during 1995, a decrease of 10.6 per cent. compared with the 872,936 total in 1994.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much funding was committed by the Welsh Development Agency to each of the objective 5(b) projects in 1995 listed in his letter of 8 January 1996, ref. CT/95–16178, in answer to the hon. Member for Pembroke; and how much has been allocated to each project to date. [9615]

Mr. Hague: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Delegated Legislation

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many of the powers to make statutory instruments exercisable by the Secretary of State under primary legislation enacted since 1979 are subject to *(a)* the negative and *(b)* the affirmative resolution procedure. [9590]

Mr. Hague: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Cardiff Bay Opera House Trust

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation concerning the future public funding of the Cardiff Bay opera house trust; when the present public funding of the trust expires; and if he will make a statement. [9721]

Mr. Hague: None. This is an operational matter for the corporation.

Staffing

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the latest number of staff employed for each civil service grade by his office, indicating the percentage who are Welsh speaking where this is known. [2067]

Mr. Hague *[pursuant to his reply, 4 December 1995, c. 76–77]:* I regret that there was an error in my answer. The figure should accordingly read:

Grade	*Number of people*	*Percentage who have notified they have some ability in the use of Welsh*
G1	1	100

SOCIAL SECURITY

Housing Benefit

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the total amounts paid to recipients of housing benefit in (1) Scarborough and Whitby, (2) Torquay, (3) Weston-super-Mare, (4) Bournemouth, (5) Brighton, (6) Eastbourne, (7) Newquay, (8) Ramsgate, (9) Margate, (10) Southend-on-Sea, (11) Clacton, (12) Great Yarmouth, (13) Barmouth, (14) Pwllheli, (15) Llandudno, (16) Rhyl, (17) Prestatyn, (18) Southport, (19) Lytham St. Annes, (20) Fleetwood, (21) Morecombe, (22) Skegness, (23) Cleethorpes, (24) Minehead, (25) Worthing, (26) Bridlington, (27) Bognor Regis, (28) Torbay, (29) Polperro, (30) Brixham, (31) Falmouth, (32) St. Ives, (33) Ilfracombe, (34) Burnham on Sea, (35) Weymouth and (36) Herne Bay, in *(a)* 1991–92 and *(b)* the latest year for which figures are available. [3192]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table.

Housing benefit expenditure

£ millions

	Town for which expenditure details requested	*Local authority covering the town*	*1991–92 housing benefit expenditure*	*1993–94 housing benefit expenditure*
1	Scarborough and Whitby	Scarborough	9.2	14.5
2	Torquay	Torbay	See Torbay	See Torbay
3	Weston super Mare	Woodspring	14.0	23.8
4	Bournemouth	Bournemouth	27.7	41.7
5	Brighton	Brighton	34.2	49.9
6	Eastbourne	Eastbourne	12.4	19.9
7	Newquay	Restormel	6.4	11.5
8	Ramsgate	Thanet	19.1	31.4
9	Margate	Thanet	19.1	31.4
10	Southend on Sea	Southend on Sea	22.7	36.0
11	Clacton	Tendring	11.4	16.9
12	Great Yarmouth	Great Yarmouth	10.7	15.4
13	Barmouth	Meirionnydd	1.9	2.8
14	Pwllheli	Dwyfor	1.9	2.4
15	Llandudno	Aberconwy	3.8	5.4
16	Rhyl	Rhuddlan	5.1	7.9
17	Prestatyn	Rhuddlan	5.1	7.9
18	Southport	Sefton	26.2	37.5
19	Lytham St. Annes	Fylde	4.0	6.0
20	Fleetwood	Wyre	4.5	7.5
21	Morecombe	Lancaster	12.9	17.9
22	Skegness	East Lindsey	9.6	13.2
23	Cleethorpes	Cleethorpes	4.9	6.7
24	Minehead	West Somerset	3.4	5.4
25	Worthing	Worthing	9.4	14.8
26	Bridlington	East Yorkshire	7.3	10.8
27	Bognor Regis	Arun	12.7	21.9
28	Torbay	Torbay	19.0	27.7
29	Polperro	Caradon	4.8	8.5
30	Brixham	Torbay	See Torbay	See Torbay
31	Falmouth	Carrick	7.3	11.2
32	St. Ives	Penwith	6.6	11.1
33	Ilfracombe	North Devon	8.6	13.4
34	Burnham on Sea	Sedgemoor	8.1	13.2
35	Weymouth	Weymouth	7.8	10.6
36	Herne Bay	Canterbury	15.2	19.6

Expenditure figures are those for the local authority districts covering the towns in question. Where a local authority has the same name as a town, for example Brighton, it is possible that they do not cover the same geographic area.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the numbers of people aged under 25 years who will be affected by the changes announced in housing benefit for young people in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97 and *(c)* 1997–98. [8508]

Mr. Evans: The proposed changes are to come into effect on 7 October 1996. All new claims after that date, movers, and claims made from 2 January 1996 at the first review will be affected.

Some 180,000 single people aged under 25 years live in the private rented sector and receive housing benefit. We estimate that some 130,000 in 1996–97 and 150,000 in 1997–98 will be affected.

Ministerial Travel and Accommodation Costs

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the total cost for himself and other departmental Ministers for each year since 1991–92, including the current year of *(a)* overseas travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers and their advisers, *(b)* car and chauffeuring costs of Ministers, *(c)* ministerial security costs and *(d)* domestic travel and accommodation expenses of ministers. [6408]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table:

Financial year	*[1]Overseas travel and accommodation* £	*Car and chauffeuring costs* £	*[2]Domestic travel and accommodation* £
1991–92	n/a	[1]286,391.00	n/a
1992–93	21,115.27	[1]274,758.00	n/a
1993–94	17,717.54	[1]290,241.00	n/a
1994–95	27,570.38	[2]325,815.00	17,228.00
1995–30/11	4,222.35	[2]203,088.00	12,225.00

[1] Includes expenditure incurred by Ministers and officials acting in direct support of Ministers.
[2] Includes expenditure by Minsters only.
n/a = not available.
Expenditure on Ministerial security costs is included in the running costs expenditure of the Departme.t which is published in the Annual Report.

Departmental Running Costs

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the cost of running his departmental office, and that of his predecessor, for each year since 1990–91 including the current year, broken down into *(a)* telephone bills, *(b)* total staff costs, *(c)* press and communications, *(d)* entertainment, *(e)* alcoholic drinks, *(f)* non-alcoholic drinks, *(g)* stationery, *(h)* office refurbishment and *(i)* other. [6407]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Financial year	*Total staff cost* £	*Hospitality* £
1990–91	n/a	7,111.00
1991–92	n/a	8,230.00
1992–93	n/a	6,846.00
1993–94	n/a	5,667.00
1994–95	1,885,938.00	14,859.00
1995–30/November	1,026,079.00	7,893.00

1. Expenditure on hospitality includes the annual reception for disabled people and organisations representing them held by the Minister of State for Social Security and Disabled People.
2. Expenditure on hospitality includes entertainment, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks.
3. Expenditure on telephone bills, press and communications, stationery and office refurbishment is included in the running cost expenditure of the Department which is published in the Annual Report.
4. The information is for all Ministerial offices.
n/a = not available.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library a copy of

the guidance issued by the Benefits Agency medical services to assist its medical practitioners when considering incapacity benefit applications. [7749]

Mr. Burt: A copy of the medical advisers' guide to incapacity benefit is available in the Library.

Mr. Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people to date have undergone a medical examination by a medical assistant of the Benefits Agency in relation to claims for the consideration of incapacity benefit; and how many of those applicants have had their benefit stopped as a result. [7750]

Mr. Burt: Information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

	Number
Total examinations	[1]222,003
Total all work test cases disallowed following examination	[2]39,626

[1] Includes all work test examinations for Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance and credits only cases.
[2] As there is often a delay between the examination and the adjudication officer's decision this figure does not accurately reflect the proportion of examinations which resulted in disallowance.
1. All information is from 13 April 1995 to 30 November 1995 and is subject to change.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated number of hours per month that Benefits Agency doctors will spend dealing with incapacity benefit claims in 1996–97. [8016]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 13 December, *Official Report*, column *670*, regarding claims for incapacity benefit, if he will express the numbers of incapacity benefit claimants in the various categories as a proportion of the total. [7812]

Mr. Burt: The information requested is in the table.

	Per cent.
Disallowed for failure to return questionnaire (IB50) without good cause as proportion of total questionnaires issued	0.5
Disallowed for failure to attend medical examination without good cause as a proportion of total examinations performed	0.4
Found capable of work following all work test as a proportion of all work test examinations	[1]17
Appeals lodged with ITS as proportion of those failing all work test	31
Successful appeals as proportion of those heard	43
Appeals superseded by adjudication officer as proportion of those lodged	3.8

[1] As there is often a delay between the examination and the adjudication officer's decision this figure does not accurately represent the proportion of examinations which resulted in disallowance.
1. Figures include only incapacity benefit claimants and are subject to change.
2. All figures to end of October 1995.

Child Support Agency

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the benefit savings resulting from activities in respect of liable relatives in each year since 1989; and how much of this was attributable to maintenance paid. [8142]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is in the list:

1989–90: £207 million

1990–91: £232 million

1991–92: £283.9 million

1992–93: £313 million.

In 1992–93 liable relative action fell under the umbrella of the child support unit.

These figures include savings made where the level of maintenance reduced the amount of income support in payment; where maintenance removed the need for income support; and those cases where the claim for income support was withdrawn following liable relative action. It is not possible to break the figures down into these different categories.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security to what extent the benefit savings claimed by the Child Support Agency are calculated in a manner which gives a like-for-like comparison with *(a)* the liable relatives unit and *(b)* the court system which preceded it. [8120]

Mr. Mitchell: Because of the differing nature of the work, there is no direct like-for-like comparison.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what plans he has to audit the benefit savings figures produced by the Child Support Agency; [8126]

(2) what assessment he has made of accounting methods used by the Child Support Agency to calculate benefit savings. [8122]

Mr. Mitchell: Audits were carried out by Price Waterhouse in 1993–94 and 1994–95. The auditors found that the procedure for reporting and measuring benefit savings was more likely to understate than overstate benefit savings.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the benefit savings claimed by the Child Support Agency are calculated on the same basis as the benefit savings estimates in the financial memorandum of the Child Support Act 1991. [8127]

Mr. Mitchell: No. While the Child Support Agency's benefit savings figures include the effect on benefit expenditure of maintenance paid calculated on the same basis as the estimates for the financial memorandum, the latter figure also included an estimate of the longer-term effect on expenditure of a reduction in the number of lone parents on benefit resulting from enhanced work incentives and other factors. The benefit savings figures, on the other hand, include estimates of the effect on expenditure of claims to benefit ceasing as a result of agency action but take no account of the longer-term incentive effect of the work of the Child Support Agency.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if his estimate of expenditure savings following the Child Support Act 1991 included a calculation of the effects of the withdrawal of benefit claims by recipients of income support. [8141]

Mr. Mitchell: Yes.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what procedures are followed by the Child Support Agency when contacting absent parents in cases where paternity has not yet been established; and in how many cases Child Support Agency procedures have been breached in this matter. [5767]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Peter Thurnham, dated 11 January 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the procedures followed by the Child Support Agency when tracing and identifying absent parents in cases where paternity has not been established.

Information about absent parents is provided to the Agency in the first instance by the parent with care (PWC). Where paternity is not yet established the Agency follows set procedures in contacting the alleged absent parent (AAP), and these vary depending on whether the AAP knows that the PWC considers him to be the parent of the child or children in question. Where the PWC has provided a current and confident address for the AAP, *and* the AAP knows that the PWC considers him to be the parent, the Agency issues a maintenance enquiry form by post to the AAP.

Where the PWC has provided a current and confident address for the AAP, but the AAP does not know that he is considered to be the parent, the Agency writes to him inviting him to call at the office to discuss "a social security matter". The letter does not give any indication of the Agency's interest.

If the information provided by the PWC on the identity or address of the AAP is not complete or confident, the Agency takes action to trace the right person. Child support legislation provides that this may include an approach being made to an employer to enable an AAP to be traced. The objective is to arrange for a private interview in the same way as described above, to resolve the paternity issue. Sometimes several men have to be interviewed to eliminate those whose personal details indicate they may be the AAP, before the correct man is identified.

The method of contacting an employer may be by telephone or letter. When correspondence is sent to an employer it is marked "Private and Confidential—The Personnel Manager". It gives no details for the reason for our request, but quotes the legislation which is being invoked—in this case Child Support legislation—because the employer will have already refused to give the information over the phone in response *to a generalised* "DSS" request. There are a number of reasons why we could be approaching an employer in this way, including the need to contact a parent who is due money as well as a parent who may be liable to pay it. We never divulge the precise reason to the employer either in our phone contacts or in our letters.

No correspondence should be issued to an AAP until the Agency is sure that the person traced could very well be the AAP described by the PWC. As explained above, the type of correspondence then issued depends upon whether or not the AAP knows that the PWC regards him as the parent. This is not a new way of working, the Benefits Agency and the DSS before it took similar action when it had responsibility for liable relative work.

The Agency does not collate information on the number of cases where procedures have been breached. The Agency will, of course, investigate fully any complaint that the correct procedures have not been followed, but such instances are very unusual. For example, available data shows that out of 852,763 maintenance enquiry forms issued from April 1993 (the inception of the Agency), to October 1995, 222 of them (0.026 per cent) were issued to someone who in fact had no child maintenance liability in the case concerned. Of this relatively small number, by no means all were because the CSA acted incorrectly (PWCs sometimes give wrong information), but wherever our strict procedures are breached, disciplinary action is taken against the member(s) of staff who are culpable.

You may wish to note that the Agency has traced and/or identified the whereabouts of over 100,000 absent parents since it was created in April 1993.

I hope this is helpful.

Social Security Spending

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the change in social security spending in real terms in each year since 1978–79, including estimates for each of the next three years, giving figures on the same basis as the answer of 7 June 1993, *Official Report*, column *144*. [8501]

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table.

Social Security[1] spending from 1978–79 to 1998–99

Expenditure in £ million

Years	*Cash*	*1995–96 prices*	*Percentage change in real terms over previous year*
1978–79	16,401	49,150	—
1979–80	19,377	49,755	1.23
1980–81	23,483	50,961	2.42
1981–82	28,582	56,555	10.98
1982–83	32,451	59,942	5.99
1983–84	35,159	62,066	3.54
1984–85	39,716	66,755	7.56
1985–86	43,237	68,897	3.21
1986–87	46,611	72,098	4.65
1987–88	48,982	71,936	-0.23
1988–89	49,641	68,331	-5.01
1989–90	52,357	67,365	-1.41
1990–91	56,392	67,171	-0.29
1991–92	65,710	73,672	9.68
1992–93	74,661	80,434	9.18
1993–94	81,684	85,505	6.30
1994–95	84,189	86,504	1.17
1995–96	87,100	87,100	0.69
1996–97	90,102	87,690	0.68
1997–98	93,132	88,429	0.84
1998–99	96,264	89,391	1.09

[1] Excludes non DSS expenditure on housing and council tax/community charge benefits.

1. 1994–95 figures are estimated outturn.
2. Figures from 1995–96 to 1998–99 are planned expenditure.
3. The real terms decrease over the period 1987–88 to 1990–91 is largely attributable to the fall in unemployment since 1986.
4. The figures from 1978–79 to 1989–90 are from the 1994 DR and earlier equivalents.
5. Figures from 1990–91 to 1998–99 are from the 1996–97 FSBR.

Child Care Disregard

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the average number of families who will benefit in 1996–97 from the increase in the child care disregard. [8500]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: We estimate that on average between 5,000 and 10,000 families will benefit from the increase in the child care disregard during 1996–97.

Earnings Disregards

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the effect on revenues in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98 of the freeze in earnings disregards for housing benefit, council tax benefit, invalid care allowance, unemployment benefit (daily rate) and income support claims; how many claimants (i) of each benefit and (ii) in total will be affected by the freeze; what evidence he has of the effect on work incentives of such a freeze; and if he will make a statement. [8514]

Mr. Roger Evans: None. The level of earnings disregards and thresholds are kept under review but it has never been the practice to uprate them on an annual basis.

One-Parent and Child Benefits

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he proposes to introduce regulations to integrate one-parent benefit; and child benefit; and if he will make a statement. [8510]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: We aim to commence the statutory consultation procedures under sections 170 to 176 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 in February. Regulations will be laid before Parliament as soon as possible after the consultation process is completed.

Benefits Freeze

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the effect on revenues in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98 of the freeze in social fund (i) maternity payments, (ii) cold weather payments and (iii) capital; how many claimants (1) of each benefit and (2) in total he estimates will be affected by the freeze; and if he will make a statement. [8512]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested.

If social fund maternity payments had been uprated in line with Rossi since 1990, when they were last increased, the value of estimated additional expenditure—over current forecasts—would be £7 million in 1996–97 and £8 million in 1997–98. Approximately 230,000 claimants would be affected.

Notes:

1. The information in respect of Cold Weather Payments is not available as expenditure depends on weather conditions over the next two years.

2. The information requested for capital is also unavailable.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the effect on revenues in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98 of the freeze in disregards for war pensions, student loans and covenants, expenses from sub-tenants and income from boarders under disability working allowance, family credit, housing benefit, council tax benefit, invalid care allowance, unemployment benefit (daily rate) and income support claims; how many claimants (i) of each benefit and (ii) in total will be affected by the freeze; and if he will make a statement. [8513]

Mr. Evans: None. The income disregards are kept under review, and increased only when it is prudent to do so. None of the incomes listed is taken into account in the calculation of either invalid care allowance or unemployment benefit.

Family Credit

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many and what proportion of family credit claimants receive the £10 increase for full-time work. [8516]

Mr. Roger Evans: As at 31 August 1995, 87,000 new and renewal family credit awards included the new £10 premium. Awards already in payment when the premium came into effect on 17 July 1995 will become eligible on renewal of the 26 week award. Most existing family credit recipients working 30 hours or more should therefore by now be receiving the increase. In the longer term, we estimate that 345,000 families will benefit.

Source: Family credit 5 per cent. sample of awards.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the effect of revenues in *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98 of the freeze in the maintenance disregard for family credit claims; how many claimants will be affected by the freeze; and if he will make a statement. [8515]

Mr. Evans: No estimate is made of savings to public funds when a disregard on income is not increased. The income disregards are kept under review and are increased only when it is prudent to do so.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families are currently in receipt of family credit and what has been the cost of this benefit in each year since 1989–90. [9264]

Mr. Evans: The latest available information is that 605,800 families were receiving family credit on 30 April 1995. The cost of family credit in each year from 1989–90 is set out in the table:

Year	*Family credit outturn £ million*
1989–90	425
1990–91	494
1991–92	626
1992–93	929
1993–94	1,208
1994–95	1,441

Source:
Family Credit Statistics Quarterly Enquiry April 1995.
1995 Departmental Report.

Housing and Council Tax Benefits

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the effect on revenues in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98 of the proposal to extend help with housing benefit and council tax benefit during the first four weeks of work for unemployed people returning to work. [8505]

Mr. Roger Evans: The estimated additional cost of paying of housing benefit and council tax benefit for the first four weeks for unemployed people, lone parents,

carers and those attending Government training schemes who return to work is £50 million for each of the years 1996–97 and 1997–98. The overall final cost will depend on the number of people whom this work incentive measure helps back into work. We shall be monitoring and evaluating this carefully.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action heads of his Department's executive agencies are taking to safeguard the provision of pre-retirement courses; and if he will make a statement. [9139]

Mr. Burt: The Department and its agencies—except the Resettlement Agency, which will cease to operate on 1 April 1996—are committed to offering pre-retirement courses to all eligible staff. There are no plans to change this arrangement.

Habitual Residence Rules

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what savings have resulted from the application of the habitual residence rules. [9347]

Mr. Roger Evans: The savings from the application of the habitual residence test for the period August 1994 to November 1995 are estimated at £37 million.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many asylum seekers living in the parliamentary constituency of Tottenham have children living with them; and how many *(a)* have claimed and *(b)* receive child benefit. [9814]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Andrew Smith: to ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 4 December, *Official Report*, column *90*, if the administrative costs of implementing the jobseeker's allowance are additional to those referred to in paragraph 6.19 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1995–96"; and for what reasons these additional costs have arisen. [9810]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administrative costs of implementing the jobseeker's allowance are additional to those referred to in paragraph 6.19 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1995–96". Provision for last year was made on account, pending identification of the full costs of implementation.

Departmental Running Costs

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 4 December, *Official Report*, column *90*, what he expects the £200 million DSS administrative costs which have been reclassified as running costs from other current expenditure in 1996–97 will be spent on; and for what reasons it has proved necessary to reclassify this. [9809]

Mr. Burt: The reclassification of £200 million DSS administrative costs from other current expenditure to running costs represents a reversal of an earlier, incorrect reclassification. This arose from uncertainties about the vote impact of outsourcing proposals in respect of the Information Technology Services Agency. It returns DSS running costs provision to the level agreed in the public expenditure survey. Details of how this provision will be applied will be provided in the forthcoming social security departmental report "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1996–97 to 1998–99".

Delegated Legislation

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many of the powers to make statutory instruments exercisable by the Secretary of State under primary legislation enacted since 1979 are subject to *(a)* the negative and *(b)* the affirmative resolution procedure. [9593]

Mr. Burt: The information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Funeral Payments

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many funeral payments from the social fund for payment towards funeral directors' fees equivalent to the maximum contribution allowable have been paid in each of the last five years, in Scotland. [8587]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Alex Salmond, dated 15 January 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about how many Funeral Payments from the Social Fund for payment towards funeral director's fees equivalent to the maximum contribution allowable have been paid in each of the last five years, in Scotland.

£500 is the maximum contribution that can be included in a Funeral Payment towards funeral director's fees. This limit was introduced on 5 June 1995 along with other changes to the Funeral Payment scheme. Prior to this date, payments were made at the discretion of the Adjudication Officer and no distinction was made between that part of a Funeral Payment which related to funeral director's fees and other costs.

The available information is in the enclosed Table A which shows the number of Funeral Payments paid in Scotland, in each month since 5 June 1995, where the amount paid towards the funeral director's fees has been restricted to £500.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Table A

Month	*Number of cases*
June	41
July	260
August	410
September	351
October	416
November	364
December	333
Total	2,175

The number of Funeral Payments made in Scotland since June 1995 where that part of the award relating to funeral director's fees has been restricted to £500.

War Pensions Agency

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if staff working for the War Pensions Agency receive commission in respect of the number of claims which are met; and if he will make a statement. [9521]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: This is a matter for Mr. Kevin Caldwell, the chief executive of the War Pensions Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from K. C. Caldwell to Mr. Stephen Byers, dated 15 January 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about commission to War Pensions Agency (WPA) staff.

WPA staff do not receive commission in respect of the number of claims which are met.

All staff in WPA, as in other agencies, receive pay awards related to performance. Performance markings are based on achievement of ranges of personal objectives derived from the Agency's high level targets, as published in the business plan.

I hope you find my reply helpful.

Benefits Agency

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 5 December, *Official Report*, column *152*, which offices of the Benefits Agency, other than the Sheffield office, have issued letters to claimants regarding the proposed changes in entitlement under the urgent cases regulations; what action was taken regarding those letters; and if he will place copies of them in the Library. [6434]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of income support is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 15 January 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question, pursuant to his Answer of 5th December, Official Report, column 152, which offices of the Benefits Agency, other than the Sheffield office, have issued letters to claimants regarding the proposed changes in entitlement under the urgent cases regulations; what action was taken regarding those letters; and if he will place copies of them in the Library.

Benefits Agency offices are organised on a District basis and each District can include up to six offices. Annex A, provides a list of those Districts which incorrectly issued letters to customers following the announcement of the proposed changes.

Some Districts issued clerical notifications, examples of which are at Annex B and will be placed in the Library.

Other Districts issued disallowance notices via the Income Support Computer System (ISCS). Unfortunately, it is not practicable to provide copies of these as they are made-up from a library of more than 1000 standard paragraphs and differ depending on a customer's individual circumstances.

Instructions were issued to all District offices on 1 December 1995 advising that decisions should be rescinded and letters of apology sent to all the customers involved.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Annex A

List of Benefits Agency District offices that issued letters to customers following the proposed changes in entitlement under the urgent case regulations.

Sheffield East
Leaside
Harrow and Hillingdon
Manchester Central
Manchester South
Sale and East Cheshire
North Surrey
South West Thames
Berkshire
Lea Roding
South Leicestershire
Preston
Makerfield Benefit Centre.

Child Care (Heringey)

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many unaccompanied children are being cared for by the London borough of Haringey under the Children Act 1989. [9815]

Mr. Bowis: I have been asked to reply.

The latest validated information available centrally on the London borough of Haringey is for 31 March 1993, when there were no children being looked after because they had no available parents or other persons with parental responsibility.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 17 January 1996

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Crown Court Statistics

Mr. Straw: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the number of cases coming to trial in the Crown court, acquittals and convictions in 1994, and in that part of 1995 for which figures are now available. [8479]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Jack Straw dated 17 January 1996:

CROWN COURT TRIAL, ACQUITTAL AND CONVICTION FIGURES FOR 1994 AND 1995

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about the number of cases coming to trial in the Crown Court in 1994 and 1995 and the number of acquittals and convictions in these years.

The figures requested are as follows:

	1994	*1995 (January–November)*
Cases committed to the Crown Court	89,301	75,790
Defendants pleading guilty	59,827	58,650
Defendants pleading not guilty:		
convicted on one or more counts	15,206	14,879
acquitted on all counts	15,772	15,299

The total number of defendants does not equate directly to the number of cases committed to the Crown Court as a proportion of cases will have more than one defendant and as some cases are discontinued by the prosecution before trial.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Upper Waiting Hall Exhibition

Ms Jowell: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to NatWest's "Face 2 Face with Finance" scheme to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall from 19 February to 23 February. [8090]

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 19 February to Friday 23 February 1996.

DEFENCE

Gulf War (Low Flying)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the comments by Sir Peter de la Billiere on the suspension of low flying in the Gulf war for the future operational needs of low flying; what are the consequences for low flying training; and if he will make a statement. [9483]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) on 15 January 1996, *Official Report*, columns *423-24*.

Torture

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to investigate allegations of torture regarding soldiers of the Royal Welch Fusiliers serving in Bosnia. [9395]

Mr. Soames: I refer the Hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Newport, West on 15 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *425-26*.

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if soldiers from the Royal Welch Fusiliers will give oral evidence to the war crimes tribunal at The Hague regarding allegations of torture in Bosnia. [9394]

Mr. Soames: As part of its investigation into the detention of UN personnel by Bosnian Serb forces, the UN war crimes tribunal proposes to interview a representative group of soldiers from 1st Battalion, Royal Welch Fusiliers who were among those taken hostage in May 1995.

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guidance he intends to issue to *(a)* Departments, *(b)* executive agencies, *(d)* non-departmental bodies and *(d)* outside bodies and arms-length organisations which he has responsibility for, or an interest in, regarding the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if he will make a statement. [9224]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 15 January by my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People, *Official Report*, columns *417-18*. I will ensure that my Department and any bodies for which it is responsible will be made aware of their responsibilities under the Act.

Cyprus (Forces' Behaviour)

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures have been taken by the British military authorities in Cyprus to control the behaviour of British military personnel towards the local population when off duty. [9392]

Mr. Soames: British Forces Cyprus attaches great importance to the maintenance of the very good existing relations with the local population. With this in mind, all service personnel and their dependents are briefed on the expected standards of conduct on arrival in Cyprus. The message is reiterated in routine and other orders and the Commander, British Forces Cyprus, regularly reminds his

subordinate commanders that they have a responsibility to ensure that service personnel behave in an exemplary manner both on and off duty.

This is reinforced by a number of selective restrictions which exclude service men from potential trouble spots. The tourist strips in Limassol and Larnaca are subject to a 1 am curfew for service personnel, and individual premises elsewhere may be placed out of bounds. In addition, the Ayia Napa area remains out of bounds in the wake of the death of Louise Jensen in September 1994. The penalties for the infringement of these rules range from a fine to the sending home of the individual concerned to the UK.

Many disturbances in Cyprus involving groups of local youths are unconnected with the British military presence, with service personnel occasionally suffering unprovoked attacks. The restrictions applied are, therefore, as much to protect UK military personnel as for other reasons. Analysis shows that British Forces Cyprus has a good record for discipline, with a relatively small number of serious disciplinary incidents.

Landmines (International Ban)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress is being made in the international discussions aimed at outlawing the use of landmines. [9385]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The first resumed session of the UN weaponry convention review conference is taking place this week in Geneva. The purpose of this conference is to strengthen protocol II to the convention, which governs the use of mines in armed conflict. We are working hard to achieve international agreement on effective measures to reduce the dangers to civilian from the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel mines.

Devonport Dockyard

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has received on the stability of the geological base on which Devonport dockyard is built; and if he will make a statement. [9381]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Site investigations, including borehole surveys, and desk studies have been carried out to verify that the nature of the underlying geology is suitable to support the development of nuclear submarine refitting facilities at Devonport royal dockyard. The surveys confirmed that the rock underlying the site will form a suitable foundation for the proposed nuclear installations. No significant geological problems have been encountered on site to date.

Trident Refitting

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the public expenditure implications of the Trident missile submarine refit at Devonport beyond those specified in the successful tender documents submitted by Devonport Management Ltd. [9380]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Negotiations on the design and build of facilities for refitting Vanguard class submarines at Devonport are proceeding and it would not be appropriate to speculate about details, including cost, while negotiations are under way.

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he intends to take to ensure the highest safety standards are enforced in the future refitting of Trident submarines. [9358]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Refitting facilities for nuclear powered submarines are being designed and will be constructed to meet all necessary safety standards and are being monitored and regulated by both civilian and MOD authorities. The future operators of the nuclear powered submarine refitting facility will be required to demonstrate to these authorities the appropriate levels of safety standards in order to obtain a nuclear site licence and the necessary consent to operate the facility.

Ms Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of the negotiations with Devonport Management Ltd. over Trident refitting. [9357]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Negotiations on the design and build of the facilities for refitting Vanguard class and ultimately all nuclear powered submarines at Devonport are proceeding with the consortium forming Devonport Management Ltd. A decision on contract award is expected in the first part of this year.

Ms Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions there have been formal and informal contacts with Rosyth royal dockyard on the Trident refit programme since July 1993; and who initiated each contact. [9355]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Between July and September 1993, my Department corresponded regularly with the Rosyth royal dockyard management company about the decision to construct nuclear submarine refitting facilities at Devonport. Since then, there have been no formal discussions or negotiations with the company about the location at which Vanguard class submarines will be refitted. During the last year, the company wrote on two occasions indicating that Rosyth would be capable of accommodating Vanguard class refits should the Government wish to reconsider their decision. I wrote to the company in August to the effect that the Government have no such plans. No record is held of the number of informal contacts that Ministers or officials have had with representatives of the Rosyth royal dockyard management company since July 1993 nor of the topics of discussion.

MOD Police

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much the Royal Ordnance paid his Department for the services of the Ministry of Defence police in *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)* 1994–95; and if he will make a statement. [9376]

Mr. Soames: It is not the Department's practice to disclose commercially sensitive information.

Army Ambulances

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Army ambulances were *(a)* used and *(b)* damaged or lost in (i) the Gulf conflict and (ii) in deployment with the United Nations in the former Yugoslavia. [9456]

Mr. Soames: Information regarding the number of Army ambulances used, damaged or lost during the Gulf conflict is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The number of Army ambulances deployed to the former Yugoslavia in support of the United Nations fluctuated throughout the period, but the average number in theatre at any one time was 17 wheeled ambulances and 13 tracked ambulances. No ambulances were lost during the deployment. Information on the number damaged is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Air Misses

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 9 January, *Official Report*, column *96*, when he expects the study on the probability of a random mid-air collision to be completed. [9778]

Mr. Soames: The study should be completed by the end of this year.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the causes of the mid-air collision on 10 January involving two Tornado F3 fighters. [9693]

Mr. Soames: An RAF board of inquiry is investigating the cause of this accident. A copy of the summary of its findings will be placed in the Library of the House in due course.

Royal Marines School of Music

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what *(a)* costs additional to those forecast and *(b)* delays in preparing the naval detention quarters are being incurred in connection with the closure of the Royal Marines school of music at Deal and the proposed move to Portsmouth; and if he will make a statement. [9681]

Mr. Soames: The contract now let for the conversion of the former RN detention quarters is at a cost of £505,000 compared with our original estimate of £450,000 contained in the consultative document. The conversion work is planned to be completed by mid-April, when the RMSM personnel return from their normal Easter leave.

Equerries

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many equerries are provided by his Department; and to whom they are allocated. [8682]

Mr. Soames: Five equerries are provided by my Department to the royal households. They are allocated as follows:

HM The Queen

HM The Queen Mother

HRH The Duke of Edinburgh

HRH The Prince of Wales

HRH The Duke of York.

Royal Yacht

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many days the royal yacht was used on official business in 1994–95. [8684]

Mr. Soames: In 1994, HMY Britannia was at sea for 164 days, of which 31 entailed royal duties, and 13 were devoted to trade promotion. In 1995, she was at sea for 156 days, of which 35 entailed royal duties, and 11 were devoted to trade promotion.

Brown and Root

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what steps he is taking and has taken to investigate Brown and Root's ability to oversee the refitting of Trident submarines; and when he will make a decision; [9356]

(2) if he will make a statement on the suitability of Brown and Root for Trident refitting work; [9353]

(3) what assessment he made of the records of the parent company in the United States in respect of contracts when considering the suitability of Brown and Root for Trident refitting work. [9354]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Brown and Root Ltd. is a UK-based company and is a member of the consortium forming Devonport Management Ltd., with which my Department is involved in contractual negotiations for the design and build of nuclear refitting facilities at Devonport. A decision on contract award is expected in the first part of this year. Steps have been, and will be, taken to ensure that any company ultimately contracted to undertake the work is both able and suitable to do so, including the provision of appropriate guarantees and assurances from parent companies where necessary.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the powers and authority of the Home Office controllers at Doncaster prison; what are their salaries; and if he will make a statement. [8056]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 January 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the powers and authority of the Home Office Controllers at Doncaster.

The Criminal Justice Act of 1991 requires that "every contracted-out prison shall have a Controller who shall be a Crown Servant appointed by the Secretary of State". This function is currently carried out at Doncaster prison by a senior governor grade and his deputy. His duties include authorising the temporary release of prisoners, their removal from association, approving the use of special cells and restraints, and carrying out adjudications. He also has a general duty to keep under review and to report to the Secretary of State on the running of the prison by and on behalf of the Director as well as to investigate and report to the Secretary of State on any allegations made against prisoner custody officers performing custodial duties at the prison. The Controller is also

authorised to suspend and refer for revocation the certificate of a prisoner custody officer if he considers him or her not to be a fit and proper person to carry out custodial functions.

The current salaries of the Controller and Deputy Controller are £43,000 and £32,000 a year respectively.

Prisons (Cellular Accommodation)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to provide more robust cellular accommodation within the prison estate. [8256]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 17 January 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about what plans he has to provide more robust cellular accommodation within the prison estate.

Since the late 1980s all new prisons and all new houseblocks and refurbished accommodation at existing prisons have included secure cellular accommodation to the current security standard. This standard is kept under review and revised as necessary.

The six new privately built and managed prisons which are planned will include secure cellular accommodation to accepted standards.

Holloway Prison

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many additional inmate places will be available for use by the end of 1996 at HMP Holloway. [8446]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 January 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking how many additional inmate places will be available for use by the end of 1996 at Holloway prison.

There are no additional inmate places planned for Holloway prison in 1996.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for how long the mother and baby unit at Holloway prison has been closed; for what reason; when it is expected to be available for use again; and if he will make a statement. [9038]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 17 January 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking how long the mother and baby unit at Holloway prison has been closed; for what reason it has been closed; and when it is expected to be available for use again.

The mother and baby unit at Holloway prison has not been closed and there are no plans to close it.

Prisons (Mental Health Care)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many inmates in Doncaster prison received some form of mental health care in each month since the prison opened. [8426]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 January 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of inmates in Doncaster prison who have received some form of mental health care in each month since the prison opened.

Listed on the attached table are details showing the number of inmates seen by a psychiatrist.

	New referrals	*Follow-up appointments*
July 1994	2	0
July 1994	4	7
August 1994	5	2
September 1994	11	7
October 1994	15	9
November 1994	20	10
December 1994	4	7
January 1995	6	4
February 1995	8	4
March 1995	19	1
April 1995	29	3
May 1995	21	11
June 1995	21	18
July 1995	20	26
August 1995	31	20
September 1995	20	17
October 1995	23	12
November 1995	24	29
December 1995	23	14

Prisons (Sick Leave)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the daily average number of prison staff at Doncaster prison absent on sick leave, as a total number and as a percentage of the total prison's work force. [8425]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 January 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the daily average number of prison staff at Doncaster prison absent on sick leave, as a total number and as a percentage of the total prison's work force.

The average daily sickness is 10.23 staff, which represents 3.28 per cent of the daily work force.

Prisons (Inmate Places)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many additional inmate places

will be available for use by the end of 1996 at Doncaster prison. [8445]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 January 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about how many additional inmate places will be available for use by the end of 1996 at Doncaster prison.

The Certified Normal Accommodation (CNA) at Doncaster prison was increased from 771 to 850 from Monday 20 November 1995 for a period of six months. This is intended to be a short term measure in order to help cope with the current high population levels. When the arrangements cease, it is intended that the CNA will revert to 771.

Prisons (Mechanical Restraints)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the *(a)* shortest, *(b)* longest and *(c)* average time during which inmates at HMP Holloway have been detained in a bodybelt or mechanical restraint since January 1990. [8443]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 January 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking what is the (a) shortest, (b) longest and (c) average time during which inmates at Holloway prison have been detained in a bodybelt or mechanical restraint since January 1990.

The shortest period of time prisoners have been restrained in a bodybelt or mechanical restraint at Holloway prison since January 1990 is 1 hour 40 minutes; the longest is 5 hours 10 minutes; and the average time is 3 hours 13 minutes.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how often the Home Office official at HMP Holloway responsible for the punishment of inmates has authorised the use of *(a)* bodybelts, *(b)* ankle straps, *(c)* handcuffs and *(c)* special segregation unit cells for each year since January 1990. [8423]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 January 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking how often the Home Office official at Holloway prison responsible for the punishment of inmates has authorised the use of (a) bodybelts, (b) ankle straps, (c) handcuffs and (d) special segregation unit cells for each year since January 1990.

The use of body belts, ankle straps, and special cells in the segregation unit have been authorised by the governor since 1990 on the number of occasions shown in the attached table, as a means of restraint and not punishment.

Handcuffs are used as a security measure when prisoners are being moved and are a routine occurrence. In the context of restraining violent prisoners there is no record of their use.

	Body belt	*Ankle straps*	*Special cell Segregation Unit*	*Handcuffs*
1990	0	0	9	0
1991	0	0	1	0
1992	0	0	13	0
1993	0	0	13	0
1994	1	0	17	0
1995	2	0	14	0

Executive Agencies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action the heads of all his Department's executive agencies are taking to protect pre-retirement courses from being abandoned in the event of such agencies seeking to make economies; and if he will make a statement. [9133]

Mr. Howard: Pre-retirement courses continue to be run for staff in the Home Office and its agencies, apart from the Prison Service, by the main Home Office. In the Prison Service courses are organised by the Prison Service college. There are no plans for any reductions in the number of courses.

Police Vehicle Escorts

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines exist for police escorting slow-moving loads on motorways, with special reference to whether single police vehicles should drive in the inside lane behind the slow-moving vehicle. [9401]

Mr. Maclean: The precise procedure adopted for the escorting of abnormal loads is an operational matter for chief officers of police. But guidelines on the escorting of abnormal loads on motorways are contained in the police service's "National Motorway Manual", which has been issued to forces by the traffic committee of the Association of Chief Police Officers.

The guidelines advise that police vehicles should be positioned not less than 50 m to the rear of the load and occupy a complete lane. In normal circumstances the lane the police vehicle occupies will be determined by the width of the load. Loads which project into the second or middle lane will normally be followed by a police vehicle in that lane.

British Citizenship

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy that every woman who is not herself a British citizen but is or has been the wife of a British citizen who is the mother of a child by that husband and the child is a British citizen, will in all but the most exceptional circumstances, be granted a permanent right to abode in the United Kingdom; and if he will give the number of such mothers who have during the last 12 months been refused right of abode in the United Kingdom. [9315]

Mr. Kirkhope: No. Each application for leave to remain as the wife of a British citizen is considered in the light of all the relevant circumstance. There are no

separate statistics of the number of foreign wives, married to British husbands, with British children, who are refused leave to remain.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 18 December, *Official Report*, column *969*, if he will specify the items of expenditure wrongly classified as hospitality in the original figure given for 1994–95. [9539]

Mr. Howard: The reclassification related solely to expenditure by the Fire Service College executive agency. The provisional figure given in my answer of 1 May at column *94*, included the cost of meals and accommodation provided free of charge to visiting lecturers, auditors and contractors who would otherwise have included an element for these expenses in their invoices, and to candidates attending certain course selection interviews which should have been attributed to the costs of the course. The expenditure classified as hospitality should have been only that incurred on the business entertaining of the college's clients and potential clients.

Incapacitants

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evidence he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the safety of (i) pepper spray and (ii) CS incapacitant. [9668]

Mr. Maclean: The Home Office police scientific development branch has reviewed all the available information about the effects on human health of CS and of incapacitant products containing oleoresin capsicum. In addition, research commissioned by my right hon. and learned Friend has been undertaken into the possible carcinogenic effects of oleoresin capsicum's main incapacitating ingredient, capsaicin.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the reason for the suspension of trials in the west midlands on CS incapacitant. [9669]

Mr. Maclean: West Midlands police is one of a number of forces due to participate in police trials of CS incapacitant for self-defence. The Association of Chief Police Officers announced last November that the trials would be delayed pending further work to ensure that the solvent used to disperse the CS irritant was the most appropriate, and to ensure that the advice to police officers and medical practitioners on the aftercare of people sprayed was the best available.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what legal costs, arising from the Scott inquiry, have been incurred by the Department on behalf of current and past *(a)* civil servants and *(b)* advisers and secondees; [8749]

(2) what legal costs, arising from the Scott inquiry, have been incurred, on behalf of Ministers and ex-Ministers, by his Department; and if he will name the individuals concerned. [8751]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* No legal costs have been incurred by my Department on behalf of Ministers, ex-Ministers, civil servants, former civil servants or other advisers or secondees of my Department in connection with the Scott inquiry. The cost of any advice in connection with the Scott inquiry given by Government lawyers as part of their normal duties cannot be quantified.

Ashford (Middlesex) Remand Centre

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to sell the site of the former Ashford (Middlesex) remand centre as soon as possible. [8531]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. David Wilshire, dated 17 January 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the future of the former Ashford remand centre.

The Prison Service is currently considering a number of sites in the London area for a new prison. The site at Ashford is not a preferred option and the Prison Service does not have any current plans to rebuild a prison on the site.

However, the anticipated growth in the prison population, particularly in the London area, necessitates the retention of the Ashford site for future possible development should the need arise. The Prison Service is currently in the process of renewing the lease for the site from the Council.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedures were used by his Department in awarding contracts for the supply of mobile and car phones to his Department and its executive agencies; and which companies were involved in tendering for these contracts. [9750]

Mr. Howard: Mobile telephones, including car telephones, are procured after comparison of service providers' tariffs to meet individual requirements at best value for money. The companies which have supplied mobile telephones to my Department in the last three years are Advance Communications, British Telecommunications Mobile, Cellnet, Mercury One-2-One, Martin Dawes, Motorola, Orange, People's Phone, Securicor, Vodac, Vodafone and WaveTech.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what agreements his Department and its executive agencies have with companies for the provision of mobile and car phones; and if he will list the companies having these contracts, the duration of the contracts, the number of phones covered by each agreement and the cost to public funds of each agreement. [9749]

Mr. Howard: There are currently no agreements with companies for the provision of mobile and car telephones other than the contracts for the individual telephones.

PRIME MINISTER

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Prime Minister what guidance he intends to issue to *(a)* Departments, *(b)* executive agencies, *(c)* non-departmental public bodies and *(d)* outside bodies and arm's-length organisation which he has responsibility for, or an interest in, regarding the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if he will make a statement. [9217]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People on 15 January, *Official Report*, column *417*. I will ensure that my office and those bodies for which I am responsible are made aware of their responsibilities under the Act.

Civil List

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister what was the amount of the civil list in 1994–95; what is the projected amount for 1995–96; and what is the current assessed surplus over actual expenditure. [8685]

The Prime Minister: As announced by my predecessor on 24 July 1990 *Official Report*, columns 299–300, and implemented by SI 1990/2018 of 12 October 1990, the provision of Her Majesty's civil list is £7.9 million in each year of the current 10-year settlement. Surplus provision in the early years is designed to cover shortfalls in the later ones.

For details of the current surplus, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) on 10 January, *Official Report*, columns *244–45*.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what legal costs, arising from the Scott inquiry, have been incurred by the Department on behalf of current and past *(a)* civil servants and *(b)* advisers and secondees; [8750]

(2) what legal costs, arising from the Scott inquiry, have been incurred, on behalf of Ministers and ex-Ministers, by his Department; and if he will name the individuals concerned. [8752]

Mr. Hanley: The cost of legal services charged by the Treasury Solicitor's Department together with accounts settled to date from public funds for the provision of external legal services incurred on behalf of Ministers, ex-Ministers, civil servants and former civil servants of my Department in connection with the Scott inquiry is £318,165.46. No legal costs have been incurred on behalf of other advisers and secondees. The cost of any legal advice in connection with the Scott inquiry given by Government lawyers as part of their normal duties cannot be quantified.

It is not the Government's policy to identify the individuals who have received legal advice either directly or indirectly.

Hafez Dalkamoni

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of Germany concerning the possible release by the German authorities of Hafez Dalkamoni. [9403]

Mr. David Davis: None. Any decision concerning the release of a national of a third country from a German prison is solely a matter for the German authorities.

British Council

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what discussions have taken place with the British Council about its withdrawal from countries overseas as a result of the proposed reductions in the aid budget. [9603]

(2) what assessment he has made of the effect on the British Council's overseas activities of the reductions proposed in the autumn statement. [9602]

Mr. Hanley: Preliminary discussions have taken place with the British Council about the possible effects of the 1995 Budget settlement. The council is preparing detailed proposals which will be discussed further with the FCO, diplomatic wing, and the ODA.

Kurds

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has evaluated in respect of alleged mass killings by Turkish troops of the Kurds; and if he will make a statement. [9695]

Mr. David Davis: I have seen no reports on the mass killings by Turkish troops. I am aware of photographs which recent newspaper articles have alleged to show Turkish soldiers posing with the mutilated bodies of Kurds. I understand that the Turkish ambassador in London has sent copies of the photographs to Ankara for investigation.

Ivory (Hong Kong)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current total of all ivory notified to his Department as held in Hong Kong; and on what date it was last assessed. [8884]

Mr. Hanley: The aggregate total declared quantity shown on commercial ivory possession licences in Hong Kong was 307 tonnes on 31 December 1995.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current number of licensed ivory traders in Hong Kong; and what was the number on 26 February 1992. [8900]

Mr. Hanley: There were 821 possession licences held by commercial ivory stock-holders in Hong Kong on 31 December 1995. The number was 963 on 26 February 1992.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the confiscation of ivory by the Hong Kong

authorities since 25 February 1992; and what prosecutions for illegal export have occurred during that period. [8902]

Mr. Hanley: Since 25 February 1992, the Hong Kong authorities have seized a total of 909.6 kg of ivory. There were three prosecutions for illegal export during the period.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current tradeable ivory stock held in Hong Kong; and to which countries ivory has been exported since 7 July 1990. [8898]

Mr. Hanley: The aggregate total declared quantity shown on commercial ivory possession licences in Hong Kong was 307 tonnes on 31 December 1995. No commercial exports of ivory have been authorised by the Hong Kong authorities since 7 July 1990 except for pre-convention specimens to the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many spot checks on ivory-holding premises were carried out by the Hong Kong authorities in each year since 1991. [8899]

Mr. Hanley: The number of checks carried out by the Hong Kong authorities on ivory-holding premises in each year since 1991 are as follows:

Year	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Number of checks	220	319	320	807	284

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on licenses issued by the Hong Kong authorities for the export of ivory since 1991. [8901]

Mr. Hanley: No commercial exports of ivory have been authorised since 1991 except for nine licences to export pre-convention specimens to the United Kingdom and USA.

British Embassy, Moscow

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total cost of modifications and decoration in the British embassy in Moscow during 1994–95; what was the figure for the previous financial year; and what was the total cost in respect of manpower and materials associated with the proposed additions to the banqueting hall in 1994. [8908]

Mr. Hanley: The total cost of modifications and decoration at the British embassy in Moscow in 1994–95 was £431,000, including £377,000 on re-organisation of the visa section. In 1993–94, the cost of modifications and decoration totalled £760,000. This included £540,000 for a complete refurbishment of the run-down—outhoused—commercial office and £215,000 for the installation of new security gates at all embassy entrances.

There is no banqueting hall as such. Formal dinners are held in the dining room of the ambassador's house and official functions in the reception room there. No additions to either room were proposed or carried out in 1994. The reception room was redecorated in 1994 at a total cost, including manpower and materials, of £28,000.

Endangered Species (Hong Kong)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the items from endangered species seized by the Hong Kong authorities in each year since 1992; and how many prosecutions arose from such seizures. [8905]

Mr. Hanley: Since 1992, the Hong Kong authorities have seized a wide variety of specimens of endangered species. Details of seizures will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses. During the same period, there were 1,239 prosecutions.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what costs his Department and executive agencies have incurred as a result of withdrawing from contracts under which mobile phones are provided; and if he will list the companies concerned. [9757]

Mr. Hanley: Within this current financial year, 11 mobile phones have been withdrawn from service at an estimated total cost of £750 for contractual disconnection charges. The companies involved were Cellcom Ltd. (seven), British Telecom Mobile Communications (two) and VODAC Ltd. (two) Most disconnections result from obsolete or damaged equipment.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what agreements his Department and its executive agencies have with companies for the provision of mobile and car phones; and if he will list the companies having these contracts, the duration of the contracts, the number of phones covered by each agreement and the cost to public funds of each agreement. [9755]

Mr. Hanley: Service contracts of 12 months duration have been awarded to the following companies:

VODAC Ltd.

VODACOM Ltd.

British Telecom Mobile Communications

Motorola Telco Ltd.

Cellular One Ltd.

Direct Mobile Communications Ltd.

DVH Communications Ltd.

Operating costs for the current financial year in respect of 217 phones; including call charges and monthly line rental/airtime totalled £83,200.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what procedures were used by his Department in awarding contracts for the supply of mobile and car phones to his Department and its executive agencies; and which companies were involved in tendering for these contracts. [9756]

Mr. Hanley: Service contracts are awarded to companies submitting the most competitive bid and offering the best value for money. The following companies have variously been involved:

VODAC Ltd.
VODACOM Ltd.
DVH Communications Ltd.
BT Mobile Services
Bradford Mobile Phone Company
DX Mobile Phones
K1 Mobile Phones
Mercury Mobile Services
Motorola Telco Ltd.
NAG Telecom
Woodend Communications.

HEALTH

Nursing Home Costs

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many extra people will now have their nursing home costs paid *(a)* entirely and *(b)* in part as a result of raising the thresholds to (i) £10,000 and (ii) £16,000; what is the cost of each category to the Treasury; how many people will have their care costs paid in full as a result of raising the capital threshold from £3,000 to £10,000; and what is the cost to the Treasury. [8696]

Mr. Bowis: Around 50,000 people in residential care and nursing homes are expected to benefit from the increases in the capital thresholds. The estimated cost of the increases is around £60 million. All residents, whether placed in residential care or nursing homes by a local authority, or in receipt of income support to pay towards their care costs, have to contribute out of income as well as capital, so the number of those having their care costs paid in full is negligible.

Vaccinations

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will consider involving parents in the preparation of future leaflets produced to warn of the adverse effects of vaccinations along the lines of the co-operative scheme established in the United States. [8702]

Mr. Horam: The design of all immunisation and promotional materials by the Health Education Authority is informed by qualitative and quantitative research into parents' needs and concerns. At the developmental stage, qualitative research is undertaken to determine parents' perceptions of individual diseases and immunisations. Draft materials are then pre-tested with parents and modified to improve clarity and understanding.

In addition, quantitative tracking studies monitor awareness of promotional activity and materials, as well as which sources of information are most used and considered to be most useful by parents of young children. This research is also used to assess the information given to them by health workers.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the incidences of Crohn's disease in relation to vaccinations. [8648]

Mr. Horam: Considerable research has already been conducted around the world and convincing links between immunisation and Crohn's disease have not been demonstrated.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to establish a compensation fund for victims of the adverse effects of vaccines along the lines of the scheme in place in the United States. [8701]

Mr. Horam: None. Compensation for alleged vaccine damage is a matter that should be determined by the courts. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security administers the Vaccine Damage Payment Act 1979. Payments made under the Act are not compensation but are intended to ease the present and future burdens of those suffering from vaccine damage and their families.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will establish a public inquiry into cases of adverse effects of the administration of immunisation against measles and rubella. [8703]

Mr. Horam: The Department has undertaken rigorous evaluation of the measles/rubella campaign, including the analysis of reports of suspected adverse reactions. This analysis concluded that measles/rubella vaccine was very safe and this conclusion was supported by two independent committees of clinical experts: the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, which advises the Department of Health, and the Committee on Safety of Medicines, which advises the Licensing Authority regarding the safety of vaccines. Details of adverse reactions have been published in "Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance", a copy of which is in the Library. This publication is sent to all doctors, pharmacists, dentists and coroners who are then free to comment publicly on the data. In view of this action and the very low reporting rate of suspected adverse reactions, there is no need for a public inquiry.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action heads of his Department's executive agencies are taking to safeguard the provision of pre-retirement courses in the event of such agencies seeking to make economies; and if he will make a statement. [9149]

Mr. Horam: The Department provides a range of counselling, "life planning", career management and employee assistance courses to those staff in the Department's executive agencies who have successfully applied under the Department's voluntary early retirement or voluntary severance schemes. The contract for these services is funded centrally by the Department.

Pre-retirement courses for staff approaching normal retirement age are not funded by the Department centrally and provision for them must be considered by individual agencies as part of their forward planning exercises.

Hospices (National Lottery)

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of the national lottery on raising funds to support the development and operation of the hospice movement and

hospices; what plans he has to ensure the financial security of hospices; and if he will make a statement. [9281]

Mr. Horam: There is as yet no conclusive evidence concerning the impact of the national lottery on the fund-raising activities of voluntary hospices. The National Council for Hospice and Specialist Palliative Care Services and the National Association of Hospice Fund-raisers, are continuing to keep this under review. Three hospices in England have, however, benefited from the national lottery fund.

To help promote hospices' financial security, Government funding for hospices and specialist palliative care services has, since 1994–95, been built into health authorities' general allocations and health authorities have been encouraged to enter into three year rolling contracts for the purchase of specialist palliative care services.

Incontinence Pads

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is in relation to the supply of incontinence pads to those who require them because of disability; what plans he has to review these arrangements; and if he will make a statement. [9212]

Mr. Bowis: The organisation of continence services in England and the matter in which they are delivered, including the provision of continence pads, are matters for district health authorities and hospital and community trusts. They are under a general obligation to provide these services where the need exists and in the light of their resources and priorities.

National health service responsibilities for meeting continuing health care needs, which include the provision of community health services such as the supply of continence pads, are set out in circular HSG (95) 8, copies of which are available in the Library.

Dentists

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists in each family health services authority have withdrawn from the NHS in each year since 1992. [9503]

Mr. Malone: This information will be placed in the Library. At 30 September 1995, there were 15,951 dentists on the lists of family health services authorities in England, the highest September figure ever.

Divorce

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what forecast has been made by Her Majesty's Government of the proportion of new and recent marriages that are likely to end in divorce; and what previous estimates have been made. [9601]

Mr. Horam: An estimate has recently been made of the proportion of marriages which would end in divorce if divorce and death rates each remained at the average level recorded throughout 1993 and 1994. On this basis, 41 per cent. of marriages in England and Wales would end in divorce. Earlier estimates based on 1979–80 and 1987 rates remaining constant were 34 and 37 per cent. respectively. The latest estimate, together with associated commentary and technical explanation, is due to be published by HMSO in mid-March in an article in "Population Trends, 83", copies of which will be placed in the Library.

Newcastle General Hospital (Chemotherapy)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients are currently receiving chemotherapy in Newcastle general hospital; how many were turned away from the hospital during the first two weeks in January 1996 owing to the scarcity of beds and; if he will make a statement. [9670]

Mr. Horam: This is a matter for the Freeman Group of Hospitals national health service trust, which manages chemotherapy treatment on the Newcastle general hospital site. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Leonard Barron, chairman of the trust for details.

NHS Trusts (Staffing)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will instruct the NHS executive to investigate medical staffing in NHS trusts. [9906]

Mr. Malone: The national health service executive takes advice on staffing from the advisory group on medical education, training and staffing. The number of doctors in higher specialist training in each specialty is planned through the specialist workforce advisory group, to ensure that there are sufficient trained candidates to fill consultant posts in the future.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what would be *(a)* the annual cost and *(b)* the current charges if prescription charges had been raised in line with price inflation since 1979. [8962]

Mr. Malone: The loss of income to the national health service if the prescription charge had been raised in line with the GDP deflator index would be about £260 million per year. This calculation is based on a comparison with charge income in 1994–95.

The standard prescription charge per item would be £0.51.

Cataracts

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was the number of operations for cataracts undertaken in each of the last five years by the NHS; [9193]

(2) what is the estimated annual cost to the NHS of cataract eye disease; [9191]

(3) what is the incidence of cataract eye disease in England, Wales and Scotland. [9192]

Mr. Horam: The number of eye lens operations, which are mainly for cataracts, undertaken in England in the last five years is shown in the table.

Year	Thousands
1989–90	92.2
1990–91	97.9
1991–92	111.7
1992–93	118.6
1993–94	130.5

Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics.

Information on the incidence and the estimated annual cost to the national health service in England of cataract eye disease is not available centrally.

Information concerning Wales and Scotland is a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland.

Meningitis

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to improve the information and training offered to general practitioners in diagnosing meningitis; and if he will make a statement. [8760]

Mr. Horam: The chief medical officer issued advice on meningococcal infection in his update letter of October—CMO update 7—which is sent to all doctors, copies of which are available in the Library. In this letter, doctors were reminded of the seasonal increase in meningococcal infection, were given advice on the early diagnosis of suspected cases and on the need for antibiotic treatment and urgent referral to hospital. The letter follows on from previous reminders which have been sent to general practitioners in the past. Additionally, articles in medical journals continually emphasise to doctors advice similar to that issued by the chief medical officer.

The training received by GP trainees during their vocational training year covers infectious diseases. This is supplemented and developed further through the inclusion of infectious diseases in continuing medical education programmes.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what information is made available on a nationwide basis to parents in care of infants of the symptoms of meningococcal disease and the procedures that should be adopted once the symptoms have been observed; and what plans he has to increase the information made available during an outbreak of 'flu; [8893]

(2) what steps his Department is currently taking to inform the public of the symptoms of meningitis and the procedures that should be adopted at the outset of such symptoms; [8896]

(3) the leaflet produced by the Department on meningitis was first made available; and in what manner the leaflet has been distributed. [8894]

Mr. Horam: Health visitors provide new parents with the Health Education Authority's leaflet "A Guide to Childhood Immunisations", which includes advice on recognising meningitis. In February 1994, new public information leaflets on meningitis and septicaemia were sent to all general practitioners to be made available to the public. Copies of both leaflets are available in the Library. Supplies of the leaflet were provided to the National Meningitis Trust and Meningitis Research. Leaflets have also been distributed to college students and there was a further wider distribution to students in September 1995. The Department of Health also provides funding to the National Meningitis Trust to support its valuable information and support work. The trust is active in raising public awareness immediately before, and during, the winter peak. Advice on recognising meningitis can be found in the Health Education Authority's "Birth to Five" book which is issued to all first-time parents. The Department of Health also contributes to the many newspaper articles and television and radio programmes that appear during the winter peak.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for health what procedures are currently in place to inform staff working in nurseries, playgroups and schools of the symptoms of meningitis and the procedures that should be adopted once the symptoms have been observed; and if his Department plans to update these procedures. [8895]

Mr. Horam: This is a matter for local arrangement by the local consultant in communicable disease control. Revised guidelines for outbreak management of meningococcal infection, prepared by the meningococcal working party of the Public Health Laboratory Service, were published in the "Communicable Disease Report" vol. 5, No. 13 in December, copies of which are available in the Library. The guidance has been sent to all public health physicians including consultants in communicable disease control and includes advice on notifying nurseries, playgroups and schools.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what procedures were used by his Department in awarding contracts for the supply of mobile and car phones to his Department and its executive agencies; and which companies were involved in tendering for these contracts. [9753]

Mr. Horam: In September 1993, the Department invited, via an advertisement in the EC *Journal*, tenders for the supply of minor items of telecommunications equipment which included mobile telephones. Full open tendering procedures were followed. The companies which tendered were:

Vodafone
Mercury Communications
Rocom
Martin Dawes
BT (Cellnet)
Interconnect
Phillips
Securicor
Pennine Telecoms Ltd
Motorola

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what agreements his Department and its executive agencies have with companies for the provision of mobile and car phones; and if he will list the companies having these contracts, the duration of the contracts, the number of phones covered by each agreement and the cost to public funds of each agreement. [9752]

Mr. Horam: A contract of three years with a possible one-year extension was awarded to Vodafone from 1 April 1994 for the supply of mobile and car phones. For each mobile phone ordered, a one-year agreement applies—thereafter 90 days notice is required to terminate individual mobile phone agreements. Since April 1994 approximately 200 mobiles have been issued at a rental cost of £60,000—£300 per unit per annum. In addition, there are the call charges at £30,000, which average about £150 per unit per annum.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what costs his Department and executive agencies have incurred as a result of withdrawing from contracts under which mobile phones are provided; and if he will list the companies concerned. [9754]

Mr. Horam: No costs have been incurred by the Department as a result of withdrawing from the contract with Vodafone as it is still in place.

Live Vaccines

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase funding support for research into alternatives to live vaccines. [8700]

Mr. Horam: The main agency through which the Government support medical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council. The MRC is an independent body which receives its grant-in-aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. The MRC gives high priority to research relevant to developing new and improved vaccines against diseases. A proportion of this is relevant to developing alternatives to live vaccines.

ENVIRONMENT

Fur Imports

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library the briefing notes prepared by United Kingdom representatives in Brussels for the Coreper deliberations on the import of furs from animals caught in leg-hold traps in countries outside the European Union. [8698]

Mr. Clappison: It would not be appropriate for such papers to be placed in the Library. The papers are internal documents whose disclosure might harm the frankness and candour of internal discussion.

Local Government (Services to Disabled People)

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest assessment of the impact of local government reorganisation on the provision of services for disabled people; what guidelines he *(a)* has issued, and *(b)* intends to issue, to unitary authorities on the provision of services for and to disabled people; what arrangements he intends to put in place to ensure the continuation of services which are currently provided across the new local government authority boundaries; and if he will make a statement. [9238]

Sir Paul Beresford: All new unitary authorities will be responsible for deciding how their statutory responsibilities for personal social services can best be discharged. On 12 May 1995 the Department of Health issued an advice document to all local authorities entitled "Social Services: Maintaining Standards in A Changing World", under cover of a local authority social services letter (95)5. Copies of the advice document are available in the Library. It draws attention to the special features of social services which the new authorities will need to consider if they are to deliver those services effectively to people who need them.

Local Government (Essex)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on which date he expects to receive the final proposals of the Local Government Commission in respect of the county of Essex; and when he expects to announce his decisions arising from the report. [9326]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Local Government Commission published its final report for all its reviews of individual districts on 19 December 1995. Interested parties have until 13 February to make representations; we aim to announce our decisions soon after that date.

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance he intends to issue to local authorities about the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if he will make a statement. [9245]

Sir Paul Beresford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People on Monday 15 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *417*.

Local Government Elections

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in what circumstances it is possible to hold the general election of all councillors for proposed unitary authorities at a time other than the normal scheduled date in May. [9325]

Sir Paul Beresford: It is possible by means of a structural change order to hold elections in other months. This is consequential upon the structural change. However, it is our policy not to have local elections other than at the normal time in May. Local authorities do not receive full powers to plan for change until the elections and we believe that, given the importance of proper preparation, there should be the full 11 months between the elections and reorganisation. In addition, because the May elections could be cancelled only by means of the structural change order, the result would be two sets of elections in the one year.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the latest date upon which parliamentary approval would be required for those orders giving effect to the proposals of the Local Government Commission in respect of the county of Essex to permit the holding in May 1996, of the general election of all councillors for the proposed unitary authorities. [9327]

Sir Paul Beresford: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to the hon. member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Davies) on 11 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *288*.

National Rivers Authority

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to require water companies to provide financial and other information to the National Rivers Authority relating to the costs of implementing activity plans drawn up by the National Rivers Authority. [9691]

Mr. Clappison: No. It is for the Director General of Water Services to secure that those appointed as water and sewerage undertakers are able to finance the proper carrying out of the functions of such undertakers. Accordingly, water and sewerage undertakers provide financial and other information to the director general including in respect of obligations arising from requirements imposed or to be imposed by the National Rivers Authority and in future the Environment Agency. As regards any requirement to provide information to the agency, the Government's view was set out in another place during the passage of the Environment Act 1995, *Official Report*, 31 January 1995, column *1376*, including in respect of the potential implications of such a requirement for the Environment Agency in carrying out its duties under section 39 of that Act.

Education Standard Spending Assessment

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list, for each authority in England, the education standard spending assessment for 1995–96 and the provisional education standard spending assessment for 1996–97. [9689]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mine Accidents

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish figures showing the number of *(a)* fatal and *(b)* serious reportable accidents, gathered by the mines inspectorate, covering (i) direct and (ii) contract employees of each of the coal companies operating deep mines which were previously publicly owned, in those months in 1995 for which figures are available; and if he will publish equivalent figures for 1994. [9775]

Sir Paul Beresford: Information for individual mines is not produced. Statistics for the industry are published as an aggregate figure in the Health and Safety Commission's annual report. Those for the period from January 1994 to March 1995 are included in the 1993–94 and 1994–95 statistics. Copies of the commission's annual reports have been placed in the House Library.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information, and at what intervals, is required to be provided to the Health and Safety Executive regarding serious injuries occurring in private coal companies. [9717]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985—RIDDOR—require the manager of the mine to notify the Health and Safety Executive forthwith in the event of an accident at work to any employee or member of the public resulting in a fatality or major injury or if there is a dangerous occurrence. Accidents at work to employees resulting in an absence of more than three days must be reported within seven days. Cases of occupational disease specified in the schedule to the regulations must be reported as soon as an employer receives notification from a doctor.

Incidents must be reported on an approved report form published by HSE. The information required includes details of the employer concerned, the premises where the incident occurred, the injured person and the nature of their injuries, and a description of the accident.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will require private coal companies to publish, at regular intervals, detailed statistics relating to the number and types of serious reportable accidents, sustained by *(a)* directly employed and *(b)* contract workers. [9776]

Sir Paul Beresford: No.

Gas Engineers

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further steps he is taking to ensure that only Confederation of Registered Gas Installers—approved gas engineers carry out work on gas appliances. [7924]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1994 require that gas installation businesses carrying out gas work in domestic or commercial premises must be registered with a body approved by the Health and Safety Executive. Currently, the approved body for this purpose is the Council for Registered Gas Installers. This legal requirement is being reinforced in the HSE's current national publicity campaign about the dangers of gas-related carbon monoxide poisoning.

On 1 December 1995, the HSE published new criteria against which it will consider and approve organisations to operate a statutory registration scheme for gas installation businesses. These criteria introduce a specific requirement on bodies so approved to publicise regularly the need for the public to use only registered installation businesses to undertake gas work. An approved body must operate within criteria prescribed by the HSE.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what will be the effect of the change in the estimated level of Government financial support for 1996–97, on *(a)* local government expenditure and *(b)* local government taxation. [8891]

Sir Paul Beresford: The overall level of aggregate external finance—that is the total central Government support for English local authorities—will increase by £960 million—2.8 per cent.—in 1996–97. This increase in AEF is to support the Government's view of the appropriate level of revenue spending for local authorities in England—total standard spending, which is £44.9 billion in 1996–97; an increase of 3.3 per cent.

Local authorities are however, subject to capping, free to set their budgets at the level they consider appropriate. The actual level of local authority expenditure will therefore depend on local decisions. If English local authorities increase their spending in line with the

increase in TSS, average council taxes in England would increase by between 5 and 6 per cent. in 1996–97. The pessimistic view of local authority behaviour taken in my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer's "Financial Statement and Budget Report", imply that council tax levels will rise by 8 per cent. on average next year.

Local authority funding in Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Elephant Ivory

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many licences he has issued for the sale of elephant ivory since 17 October 1990. [8897]

Mr. Clappison: Since 17 October 1990, my Department has issued 138 individual licences allowing the sale of items made from, or containing, ivory, in accordance with the EC convention on international trade in endangered species.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which TECs included funding for business start-up *(a)* grants and *(b)* training in their last single regeneration budget bid; and which of these bids were successful. [9195]

Sir Paul Beresford: Information in the form requested is not available. The kind of support provided for business start-up activity in SRB challenge fund bids is determined by local partnerships to reflect the needs of their localities. Challenge fund grant is made available by the Government to help meet the costs of these locally determined initiatives.

In rounds 1 and 2 of the challenge fund, a total of 25 training and enterprise councils took the lead in 39 successful bids that included funding for business start-up. Over their lifetime, these schemes are expected to provide 36,000 new business starts and to receive £140 million in challenge fund support. The TECs concerned are:

Merseyside
Greater Nottingham
Hereford and Worcester
South London
London East
Central London
City and Inner London
North West London
North London
West London
AZTEC
Gloucestershire
Cheshire, Ellesmere Port and Wirral
St Helens
South and East Cheshire
Greater Peterborogh
Herts
Norfolk and Waveney
Shropshire
Lancashire Area West and East Lancashire
Teesside
Tyneside
Northumberland
Heart of England
North Yorkshire.

A further 199 challenge fund schemes are expected to produce an additional 44,000 business start-ups over their lifetime. Although not led by TECs, most of these schemes involve TECs as members of partnerships.

Butterflies

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what value he places on the number of butterflies as an indicator group of the state of biodiversity of species; [9297]

(2) what proposals he has to monitor the number of rare and common butterflies; and what new proposals he has to establish new butterfly conservation areas; [9298]

(3) his Department will respond to the biodiversity steering group's recent published report; [9299]

(4) what proposals he has to honour the United Kingdom's commitments made at the Rio de Janeiro earth summit in regard to butterfly and moth conservation. [9300]

Mr. Clappison: The United Kingdom was one of the first countries to produce a national biodiversity plan when "Biodiversity: The UK Action Plan" was published in January 1994.

The biodiversity steering group, chaired by my Department, with members drawn from all sectors, published its findings on 13 December 1995. "Biodiversity: The UK Steering Group Report", identifies 25 butterfly and 122 moth species whose populations should be monitored where practicable. The report includes costed action plans for seven of the butterflies and three of the moths and recommends that costed action plans for a further three butterflies and 50 moths be produced within three years. The Government expect to publish their response to the report in the spring of 1996.

On 8 January, two further candidate special areas of conservation for the conservation of the marsh fritillary butterfly were submitted to the European Commission. In all six candidate SACs for this species have been notified to the European Commission. Butterflies will be one of the groups of species used in the preliminary package of UK indicators of sustainable development which my Department will publish in the early spring of 1996.

Car Boot Sales

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent discussions he has had with local authorities about more effective planning controls for car boot sales. [9622]

Sir Paul Beresford: There is a general planning permission to use land for car boot sales for up to 14 occasions in any period of 12 months. If there is a real and specific threat to amenity or the environment however, a local planning authority may withdraw this right and require a planning application for such use. We have no plans to change this position and have not recently discussed the issue with local authorities.

Tenants' Choice

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the future of tenants' choice. [10524]

Mr. Curry: Part IV of the Housing Act 1988 introduced the tenants' choice scheme in 1989. The scheme has been overtaken by other more effective initiatives which meet its objectives of improving housing management performance and providing local authority tenants with opportunities to change their landlords. Better services and more tenant control are being delivered through right to manage and tenant consultation on housing management compulsory competitive tendering. Change of landlord can be achieved through large-scale voluntary transfers, and the new estates renewal challenge fund.

The tenants' choice scheme no longer serves a useful purpose and the forthcoming Housing Bill will include provisions to repeal the legislation in England and Wales.

TREASURY

Income Tax Relief

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the full year yield of restricting income tax relief available at the 40 per cent. marginal rate to *(a)* £2,000, *(b)* £3,000, *(c)* £4,000, *(d)* £6,000 and *(e)* £8,000, (i) including and (ii) excluding profit-related pay, giving in each case the number of people affected. [7064]

Mr. Jack: The full-year yield of restricting income tax reliefs, but not personal allowances, for higher rate taxpayers only and the number of people affected at 1996–97 income levels are given in the table. Detailed information is not available to provide estimates taking account of profit-related pay.

Upper limit for total allowances[1] *£*	*Yield in full year £ million*	*Number of higher rate taxpayers thousands*
2,000	1,100	890
3,000	830	490
4,000	680	310
6,000	500	160
8,000	400	100

[1] Including only reliefs available at 40 per cent. marginal rates and excluding profit related pay.

The estimates do not take account of any behavioural effects which might result from the introduction of such a limit.

Profit-related Pay Schemes

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what evaluation his Department has undertaken of profit-related pay schemes during the last two years; and what is his evaluation of the success of the scheme in achieving the objectives intended for it. [8309]

Mr. Jack: An independent survey of the tax relief for profit-related pay was commissioned by the Inland Revenue, the Department of Employment and the Treasury and was published in May 1995. The survey suggested that tax relief had stimulated significant additional take-up of profit-related pay.

Save-as-you-earn Share Options Schemes

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many employees were involved in save-as-you-earn share option schemes in each year since 1980; how many employees use the savings and bonus to purchase shares and at what cost to public funds; and how many employees take out the savings and bonus without buying shares and at what cost to public funds. [8308]

Mr. Jack: Estimates of the cost of income tax relief for options exercised under approved savings-related share option schemes, and the number of employees to whom options were granted are published in table 6.1 of "Inland Revenue Statistics 1995", a copy of which is the Library.

The number of employees who exercised options is given in the table.

Year	*Number exercising options (thousands)*
1984–85	20
1985–86	25
1986–87	65
1987–88	60
1988–89	70
1989–90	100
1990–91	175
1991–92	165
1992–93	190
1993–94	240

An estimate of the number of employees who take out their savings and bonus without buying shares is not available, but the cost of tax relief for the related save-as-you-earn accounts is included in the estimated cost of SAYE shown in table B.1 of "Inland Revenue Statistics".

Labour Statistics

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list *(a)* the total number of adults of working age, *(b)* the total in employment, *(c)* the total who were unemployed and *(d)* the total in employment as a percentage of the total number of adults for each year since 1966. [8528]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Available information relating to 1971–95 is given in the following table.

United Kingdom (seasonally adjusted)

June of each year	*Population*[1] *Thousands*	*Workforce in employment*[2] *Thousands*	*Unemployed (claimant count) Thousands*	*Workforce in employment as a percentage of the population*[1] *Percentage*
1971	32,548	24,661	859	76
1972	32,558	24,636	727	76
1973	32,580	25,209	534	77
1974	32,583	25,280	513	78
1975	32,626	25,183	780	77
1976	32,757	24,946	1,095	76
1977	32,945	24,970	1,159	76
1978	33,173	25,115	1,150	76
1979	33,436	25,492	1,067	76
1980	33,607	25,445	1,274	76

United Kingdom (seasonally adjusted)

June of each year	*Population[1] Thousands*	*Workforce in employment[2] Thousands*	*Unemployed (claimant count) Thousands*	*Workforce in employment as a percentage of the population[1] Percentage*
1981	33,780	24,477	2,176	72
1982	33,934	24,039	2,521	71
1983	34,199	23,758	2,805	69
1984	34,480	24,412	2,897	71
1985	34,676	24,692	3,019	71
1986	34,846	24,719	3,120	71
1987	35,029	25,248	2,836	72
1988	35,166	26,137	2,294	74
1989	35,292	26,945	1,786	76
1990	35,391	27,198	1,615	77
1991	35,469	26,313	2,301	74
1992	35,533	25,738	2,735	72
1993	35,589	25,348	2,920	71
1994	35,689	25,478	2,645	71
1995	35,760	25,722	2,314	72

Notes:
[1] Men aged 16 to 64 and women aged 16 to 59 years.
[2] Includes employees in employment, self-employed, HM forces and those on work-related Government training programmes.
Source:
CSO (LMSG) and OPCS.

Unemployment Benefit (Seaham and Peterlee)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in the Seaham and Peterlee areas are in receipt of unemployment benefit. [9505]

Mrs. Angela Knight: In November 1995, the number of people claiming unemployment-related benefits—unemployment benefit, income support or national insurance credits—numbered 1,303 in the Employment Service local office area of Seaham and 1,833 in the Peterlee local office area. These figures are not seasonally adjusted.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the use of the private finance initiative in the purchase of information technology by Government Departments. [7896]

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the use of the private finance initiative in the purchase of information technology by Government Departments. [7918]

Mr. Jack: On 22 December, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced the appointment of Graham Jordan as head of the new unit set up to co-ordinate a strategic approach to information technology across Government. At the core of this approach will be the use of the private finance initiative. With Government spending over £2 billion a year on IT, there are many exciting opportunities to improve public services in this area through the involvement of the private sector. The private finance panel has already identified around 150 potential IT private finance initiative projects.

Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give an itemised breakdown of the costs of maintaining the Central Chancery of the Order of Knighthood in 1994–95. [8913]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The breakdown for 1994–95 is shown in the table.

	£000
Insignia	204
Staff	201
Printing	92
Capital equipment	16
Maintenance	12
Stationery	8
VAT	53
Less receipts	(26)
Total	560

Extra-statutory Concessions

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many extra-statutory concessions will remain in effect following enactment of clause 186 and schedule 35 of the Finance Bill. [9292]

Mr. Jack: There are 207 published extra-statutory concessions. Clause 186 and schedule 35 of the Bill will enact 11 of these. A further five will be enacted by other provisions in the Bill.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what is the estimated level of Government financial support for each local authority, for England and for the United Kingdom in constant prices for *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96 and *(c)* 1996–97, indicating the percentage yearly change in each case and the overall cumulative

change (i) net of community care and the estimated cost of local government reorganisation and (ii) including community care and where appropriate the estimated cost of local government reorganisation; [8886]

(2) what is the estimated level of Government financial support for each of the new unitary local authorities and for Scotland as a whole in constant prices for *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96 and *(c)* 1996–97, indicating the percentage yearly change in each case and the overall cumulative change (i) net of community care and the estimated cost of local government reorganisation and (ii) including community care and the estimated cost of local government reorganisation. [8887]

Mr. Waldegrave: Central Government support to local authorities comprises:

grants within aggregate external finance, which represent central Government's contribution towards the cost of core local authority services such as education and community care. They include revenue support grant, non-domestic rates redistributed to authorities from the national pools and certain grants in respect of specific services;

current specific grants outside AEF, notably in respect of housing benefit and mandatory student awards;

capital grants; and

credit approvals.

Table 6.7 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1996–97" (HC 30) set out the Government's plans for total support to local authorities and their components. The table shows those figures in the form requested, including and excluding Department's latest plans for support in respect of local government reorganisation and the current costs of community care. The capital costs of community care are not separately identified.

Table 1: Central Government support to local authorities at 1994–95 prices: United Kingdom

	1994–95	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*Yearly change 1995–96 per cent.*	*Yearly change 1996–97 per cent.*	*Cumulative change per cent.*
Including reorganisation and community care	61,254	60,438	58,725	–1.3	–2.8	–4.1
Excluding reorganisation and community care	59,771	58,239	56,074	–2.6	–3.7	–6.2

Some of these elements are distributed by Departments with responsibilities spanning Great Britain. Not all of these Departments have yet allocated their spending plans for 1996–97 between the countries of the Union. It is therefore not presently possible to break down the United Kingdom figure for support for that year. This information will be included in the statistical supplement to the "Financial Statement and Budget Report", to be published in February.

The table shows the figures which are available.

Table 2: Central Government support to local authorities at 1994–95 prices

	1994–95 £	*1995–96*[1] £	*Change* Per cent.
England			
Including reorganisation and community care	50,218	49,074	–2.3
Excluding reorganisation and community care	48,939	47,237	–3.5
Scotland			
Including reorganisation and community care	7,292	7,219	–1.0
Excluding reorganisation and community care	7,174	7,017	–2.2

[1] Figures shown in this column are not necessarily consistent with table 1 above, which is based on later information which was not broken down between the countries of the Union.

Grants and credit approvals are distributed to local authorities by a number of different Departments. Figures for the total support provided to each authority could therefore only be collated at disproportionate expense.

Cheques

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will bring forward proposals to amend the Bills of Exchange Act 1882 to allow *(a)* the electronic presentation of cheques, *(b)* dishonour of cheques by electronic means and *(c)* authenticated copies of cheques to be valid as receipts, in accordance with the recommendations of the Jack report. [10409]

Mrs Angela Knight: I am pleased to announce the publication today of a consultation document setting out proposals on these issues. Subject to the outcome of the consultation, the Government intend to bring forward an order under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994, to give effect to the proposed changes. Copies of the consultation document have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Incomes

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of wealth was owned, by the most wealthy 1, 2, 5, 10, 25 and 50 per cent. of the population in each year since 1979. [9317]

Mr. Jack: The available information on marketable wealth is given in table 13.5 of "Inland Revenue Statistics 1995", a copy of which is in the Library.

TRANSPORT

British School of Motoring

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many schools are now using the British School of Motoring's ignition young driver education course; and how many of these are supplying the names

and addresses of pupils using the British School of Motoring package. [8302]

Mr. Norris: The information requested is not held centrally. It is a matter for individual schools to determine both how and when they provide road safety education and which resource materials or programmes they use to support that teaching.

Transport Research Laboratory

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which of the shortlisted bidders he has selected as the purchaser of the Transport Research Laboratory; and if he will make a statement. [10621]

Mr. Norris: The Government have selected the Transport Research Foundation as the preferred purchaser for the final negotiations on the sale of the Transport Research Laboratory. The foundation includes members of TRL's existing management and is seeking to acquire TRL as a non-profit distributing company. Although the competing bid from the consortium of Pell Frischmann Consulting Engineers Ltd., Mouchel Associates Ltd., the Automobile Association and the Royal Automobile Club was strong, the foundation's bid was judged better to meet the objectives for the sale announced by the then Secretary of State on 14 March 1995.

We expect to complete the sale of TRL by the end of February.

Royal Train

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how often the royal train was used in 1994–95 on official business. [8683]

Mr. Watts: Between 1 April 1994 and 31 March 1995, the royal train was used 27 times to enable members of the royal family to carry out official engagements.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what procedures were used by his Department in awarding contracts for the supply of mobile and car phones to his Department and its executive agencies; and which companies were involved in tendering for these contracts. [9732]

Mr. Norris: The procedures adopted for award of contracts relating to mobile phones across the Department of Transport has ranged from full competitive tendering procedures to simple competitive quotations, dependent upon the number of phones and predicted future requirements involved.

The companies involved with the processes are, in alphabetical order:

BT Mobile, Carphone Warehouse, Connections, Cellcom, EDS, ETC Communications, Hutchison Telecom, Intercity Mobile, Intercell, Martin Dawes, Mobile Cellular, Motorola, Newgate Coms, Prestige, Securior Cellular, Talkland, Uniqueair, Uplands Radio, Vodac, Vodacom Ltd., Voicecast.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what costs his Department and executive agencies have incurred as a result of withdrawing from contracts under which mobile phones are provided; and if he will list the companies concerned. [9733]

Mr. Norris: Some £800; as a result of one agency consolidating its time contracts. Companies involved were British Telecom, Hutchison Telecom and Cellcom.

Public Transport (Fare Increases)

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list *(a)* the annual percentage change and *(b)* the increase in fares on (i) London Buses, (ii) London Underground, (iii) all London Transport, (iv) Network SouthEast and (v) British Rail in each year since 1986–87 taking 1985–86 as the base and showing the increase in both actual and real terms, what estimate he has made for 1995–96; and if [illegible] indicate the percentage change relative to the rate of inflation in each year since 1991 for (1) adults and (2) children; [9160]

(2) if he will list *(a)* the annual percentage change and *(b)* the increase in child fares on London Transport in each of the years since 1986–87, taking 1985–86 as the base and showing the increase both in actual and real terms; [9159]

(3) what is the annual per cent. increase in fares on London Buses, London Underground and British Rail Network SouthEast in each of the financial years 1985–1995. [9156]

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* The information is shown in the tables.

Percentage increases in all fares: 1986–87 to 1995–96

	London Buses		*London Underground*		*All London Transport*		*Network SouthEast*		*British Rail*	
	Actual	*Real*	*Actual*	*Real*	*Actual*	*Real*	*Actual*	*Real*	*Actual*	*Real*
1986–87	5.9	2.6	5.7	2.5	5.6	2.3	7.0	3.7	7.5	4.2
1987–88	4.9	0.9	6.4	2.3	5.8	1.7	5.2	1.2	5.4	1.3
1988–89	10.8	4.6	10.3	4.1	10.3	4.0	7.0	0.9	7.1	1.1
1989–90	10.3	2.3	11.1	3.0	10.8	2.8	8.5	0.6	8.0	0.2
1990–91	10.3	0.5	11.2	1.4	10.8	1.0	10.1	0.4	10.2	0.5
1991–92	9.6	4.6	9.9	4.9	9.7	4.7	9.5	4.5	9.2	4.3
1992–93	7.9	4.6	7.8	4.5	7.8	4.5	7.7	4.4	6.9	3.7
1993–94	8.0	6.2	7.6	5.8	7.8	6.0	7.7	5.9	5.9	4.1
1994–95	5.8	3.0	5.8	3.0	5.8	3.0	5.4	2.6	3.7	1.0
1995–96	4.5	n/a	4.5	n/a	4.5	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Percentage increases in London Transport Child fares[1], 1986–87 to 1995–96

	Actual	Real
1986–87	0.8	–2.4
1987–88	8.0	3.8
1988–89	19.5	12.8
1989–90	18.7	10.1
1990–91	9.2	–0.4
1991–92	16.4	11.1
1992–93	9.8	6.5
1993–94	3.8	2.1
1994–95	2.3	0.0
1995–96	0.1	n/a

[1] Ordinary tickets only. Information on travelcards and season tickets is not available.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what agreements his Department and its executive agencies have with companies for the provision of mobile and car phones; and if he will list the companies having these contracts, the duration of the contracts, the number of phones covered by each agreement and the cost to public funds of each agreement. [9731]

Mr. Norris: Figures are not available for the cost of each agreement nor the specific number of phones involved. Contract duration varies between 0 to 24 months, the bulk being 15 months including notice period. Companies with which the Departments and its executive agencies hold air-time contracts are, in alphabetical order.

BT Mobile, Cellcom, Hutchison Telecom, Intercell, Intercity Mobile, Martin Dawes, Motorola, Newgate Coms, Securior Cellular, Talkland, Uniqueair, Uplands Radio, Vodac.

Rail Transport Research

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he will be introducing to ensure that research into rail transport will continue following rail privatisation taking place. [8606]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* It will be a matter for companies in the railway industry to determine their own individual research requirements and how they may best be fulfilled.

London Transport

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff worked for London Transport on 24 November 1994; and how many permanent staff, full-time equivalent, were employed by London Transport on the most recent date for which figures are available. [8945]

Mr. Norris: On 12 November 1994—the nearest date to 24 November 1994 for which figures are available—London Transport employed 21,391 staff, of whom 20,437 were permanent staff, full-time equivalent.

On 9 December 1995, the most recent date for which figures are available, London Transport employed 18,152 permanent staff, full-time equivalent.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action heads of his Department's executive agencies are taking to safeguard the provision of pre-retirement courses in the event of those agencies seeking to make economies; and if he will make a statement. [9137]

Mr. Norris: The chief executives of the agencies in my Department will continue to offer pre-retirement courses to all their staff who are due to retire.

Telematics

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his Department's telematics budget has been for the last five years; and what amount has been allocated for the next three years. [9687]

Mr. Norris: There is no separate budget for telematics, the use of advanced information and telecommunciation technologies. In each particular case where a telematic solution is thought to be the most cost-effective approach, it is budgeted for in the normal way as part of the relevant programme.

A13 (Private Management)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has in respect of private management schemes for the A13. [9686]

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend announced on 28 November a further tranche of design, build, finance and operate road schemes, which included the A13 between east London and the M25.

The scope of the project is being refined, but it is intended to include the improvements at Ironbridge–Canning Town, A117 Woolwich Manor way junction and Movers lane junction, together with the management and maintenance of the A13 between east London and the M25. This will include management of the improvements between west of Heathway and Mar Dyke after construction is completed. Works are expected to commence in mid–1997.

Road Repairs

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects local authorities to have established a computerised street works register. [9333]

Mr. Norris: The Department of Transport is arranging for the provision of a computerised street works register for England and Wales. The contactor expects it to be fully operational by 1 March 1997.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what powers local authororities have to set timetables for street repairs by utilities in order to minimise traffic disruption; what plans he has to increase these powers. [9341]

Mr. Watts: Local highway authorities, in their capacity as street authorities, have a power under section 56 of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 to give directions to undertakers of proposed street works, in certain specified circumstances, as to the times when the works may or may not be carried out. The power does not apply to emergency works or to certain other urgent works for which no advance notice is required. There are no plans to increase it.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve the co-ordination of road repairs *(a)* between local authorities and *(b)* between local authorities and the Highways Agency. [9332]

Mr. Watts: Under the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991, highway authorities have a duty to co-ordinate the execution of works of all kinds in the streets for which they are responsible. That duty extends to co-ordination with other highway authorities where necessary.

Arrangements for implementing this requirement between local highway authorities are a matter for the authorities concerned. For trunk road and motorway work which affects local roads, co-ordination meetings between the Highways Agency and local highway authorities are held on a regular basis to agree future programmes of major road repairs. Improvements, through the greater use of information technology, are being developed.

British Rail Engineering Ltd. (Asbestos)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many claims for compensation for contracting asbestos-related diseases have been received by British Rail from or on behalf of former employees of British Rail Engineering Ltd. based in *(a)* York, *(b)* Derby, *(c)* Crewe and *(d)* other locations; in how many of these cases the former employee has died from an asbestos-related disease; how many of these claims have been settled; what was the (i) highest, (ii) lowest and (iii) the average cash sum paid in compensation in cases which resulted in the death of the employee; and how many weeks on average were taken in settling these claims from the time that they were initially submitted to British Rail. [9201]

Mr. Watts: British Rail has provided the following information:

BREL: asbestos-related compensation claims

	York	*Derby*	*Crewe*	*Other*
Claims registered	43	20	28	194
Claims closed	19	5	13	69

These data relate to claims registered since 1 April 1991.

Information on the number of cases in which former BREL employees have died from an asbestos-related disease, and on the compensation payable in such cases, is not readily available. In addition, in some cases the claim may be settled before death, and in others death may have occurred before the claim was submitted.

Details of financial settlements to date

Highest settlement: £262,134–05

Lowest settlement: £5,385–50

Average settlement: £37,515–64.

This information relates to all cases arising out of an asbestos-related disease, not just to those which resulted in the death of the employee.

The average time taken in settling claims from registration to closure of the case is 91 weeks. This period includes the time taken to pay plaintiff's costs and any costs payable by British Rail to its own legal advisors, as the claim cannot be closed until all legal costs have been paid.

Public Transport (London)

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the change in fares on public transport in London in real terms relative to the rest of Britain since *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 1992. [9157]

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* The table shows real percentage increases in public transport fares.

	1991–92 to 1994–95		*1992–93 to 1994–95*	
	London	*Rest of Great Britain*	*London*	*Rest of Great Britain*
Bus fares	14.2	5.9	9.4	3.7
British Rail[1]	13.4	8.9	8.6	5.1
London Underground	13.9	n/a	9.0	n/a

[1] Network SouthEast for London. All British Rail fares in Rest of Great Britain column.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to seek additional powers to deal with defective foreign HGVs. [9840]

Mr. Norris: None. The Government are satisfied that the powers in the Road Traffic (Foreign Vehicles) Act 1972 and in the Road Traffic Act 1988 are sufficient.

Water Spray

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to require commercial vehicles to take steps to reduce water spray from their vehicles. [9832]

Mr. Norris: The Department is continuing to conduct research to find a reliable and repeatable way of measuring the effect of spray on driver's vision. When the research is completed, we shall be in a better position to consider improvements to the current standards.

Loose Loads

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to require commercial vehicles to restrain or cover loose loads. [9833]

Mr. Norris: The Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 and the Environmental Protection Act 1990 already require drivers of goods vehicles to ensure that loose loads are covered or restrained when being operated on the roads or in quarries.

The Department also issues a code of practice on the safety of loads, which has gained wide recognition within the haulage industry, in which advice is given on methods to constrain loose loads.

A30

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the contract for the improvement of the A30 trunk road junction at Kennards house, north Cornwall, to be let. [9609]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Paul Tyler, dated 17 January 1996:

The Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr John Watts, has asked me to write to you in reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking when the Secretary of State for Transport expects the contract for the improvement of the A30 trunk road junction at Kennards House, North Cornwall, to be let.

It had been planned to let a contract for this scheme during the current financial year. However, in light of the reduced level of funding for National Roads announced in November's Budget Statement, the Secretary of State announced changes to the Highways Agency's Business Plan for 1995/96 on 10 January. The scheme has been deferred but will be taken forward when funds become available.

I am sorry I cannot be more forthcoming at the moment.

Public Consultation

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what public consultation exercises his Department has undertaken in the last three years in respect of transport policy. [8607]

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* "Transport: The Way Ahead" was published as part of the national transport debate launched in 1995, and sought views on the future direction of transport policy. My Department has also conducted a number of consultation exercises on individual aspects of policy including:

- Passenger Rolling Stock (January 1993);
- Gaining Access to the Railway Network (February 1993);
- The Operation of Local Bus Services outside London (March 1993);
- Consultation on Route Options for the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (undertaken by Union Railways on behalf of DoT, Summer 1993).
- Paying For Better Motorways (May 1993);
- The Merchant Shipping Registration Regulations (August 1993);
- The future of Taxi and Private Hire Services in England and Wales (October 1993);
- Consultation on the principles of DBFO policy which accompanied the document, "Preliminary Note on Design, Build Finance and Operate contracts" (April 1994);
- Privatisation of the National Air Traffic Services (May 1994);
- Donaldson Report "Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas" (May 1994);
- Wreck Removal Powers (June 1994);
- Waste Reception Facilities in UK Ports (April 1995);
- Proposals for New Regulations on Transport of Radioactive Materials by Road In GB (April 1995);
- River crossings to the East of Tower Bridge (June 1995);
- Possible changes to Bus Deregulation (July 1994).

In addition, there have been a large number of consultations on very specific and/or technical issues such as: railway noise regulations and loading gauge standards; amending highways and vehicle regulations and aviation and shipping matters.

Motor Vehicles (West Yorkshire)

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many motor vehicles over 25 years of age are currently registered in west Yorkshire. [8883]

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* An estimated 9,350 vehicles over 25 years of age are currently licensed in the west Yorkshire area. Of these, 2,900 are in private and light goods, motorcycle or tricycle taxation classes and will qualify for exemption from vehicle excise duty as a result of the vehicle taxation changes announced in the budget on 28 November 1995.

Electric Cars

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the potential use of the electric car; and what proportion of his Department's transport budget this constituted in (i) percentage and (ii) real terms. [8598]

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* The Government are considering the role that alternative fuels, including electricity, might play in minimising road transport emissions. To that end, they are continuing to sponsor studies, including the £1.2 million collaborative field trials of alternative fuels and a study into life cycle emissions. Results are expected towards the end of this year. It is not possible to apportion costs by fuel type.

Railway Stations

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many railway stations were *(a)* closed and *(b)* opened in the United Kingdom between (i) March 1974 and April 1979 and *(b)* May 1979 and December 1995; and what was the net figure for openings and closures for those two periods. [9608]

Mr. Watts: In Great Britain, between March 1974 and April 1979, 14 stations were closed and 31 opened or reopened, giving a net gain of 17 stations. Between May 1979 and December 1995, 63 stations were closed and 233 opened or reopened, giving a net gain of 170 stations. Figures for closures, openings and reopenings of stations in Northern Ireland between March 1974 and April 1979, and between May 1979 and December 1995, would be available only at disproportionate cost.

Coastguard Service

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the running cost budget for the Coastguard Agency in each of the last five years; and what it is for the current year. [9559]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Coastguard Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Ms Joan Walley, dated 17 January 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Question about running cost budgets for the Coastguard Agency in each of the last five years.

The Coastguard Agency was formed on 1 April 1994 and the budgets since then are as follows:

1994–95: £24,882

1995–96: £25,596.

Jubilee Line

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action his Department is taking to ensure that workers on the construction of the Jubilee line are legitimately employed [9104]

Mr. Norris: Day-to-day management of the Jubilee line extension project is the responsibility of London Underground Ltd., whose contracts require construction companies to comply with the appropriate legislation covering the employment of labour.

Merchant Vessels

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of merchant vessels of 500 gross registered tonnes or more registered worldwide were constructed in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland an *(d)* Northern Ireland in each of the past five years. [9566]

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* I understand that the information, as sourced from Lloyd's maritime information services, is as follows:

Operational merchant vessels in world fleet at 30 September 1995
By year and country of build

Percentage of registered vessels completed in year by country of build

Year of build	*England*	*Scotland*	*Northern Ireland*
1990	1.6	0.0	0.2
1991	1.2	0.0	0.5
1992	1.1	0.2	0.1
1993	0.2	0.2	0.2
1994	0.3	0.2	0.5

No merchant vessels were constructed in Wales during this period.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Eastern Europe

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are his Department's projections for future expenditure in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. [8948]

Mr. Hanley: Planning figures for the period 1996–97—1998–89 are being finalised. As usual, these will be published in the 1996 Foreign and Commonwealth Office departmental report in March.

WALES

Executive Agencies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action heads of his Department's executive agencies are taking to safeguard the provision of pre-retirement courses in the event of those agencies seeking to make economies; and if he will make a statement. [9136]

Mr. Hague: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments under its chief executive, Mr. T. J. Cassidy. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from T. J. Cassidy to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 January 1996:

PROVISION OF PRE-RETIREMENT COURSES

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the provision of pre-retirement courses with respect to Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments.

Cadw is an executive agency within the Welsh Office and all staff are employed by the parent Department. As a general rule, the agency does not run its own training courses. Cadw staff are eligible for in-house training courses provided by the Welsh Office (which include pre-retirement courses) and will also attend specialist courses provided by external trainers.

All staff in the agency are encouraged to attend courses relevant to their needs at the appropriate time and it is my understanding that the Welsh Office intend to continue with the existing programme of pre-retirement training.

Dentists

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations the Welsh Office had with *(a)* the British Dental Association and *(b)* dentist representative bodies in Wales, before instigating the Welsh Office initiative to attract more dentists to those areas in Wales where NHS dental capacity is currently inadequate; and if he will make a statement. [9339]

Mr. Hague: During the course of consultations on the Government's Green Paper, "Improving NHS Dentistry", Welsh Office officials met the British Dental Association, the General Dental Services Committee and held meetings with each of the eight local dental committees in Wales to which all dentists were invited. An individual meeting was offered to any dentist who wished to express views privately. Over 40 per cent. of dentists in Wales were seen in this way.

Local Government

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what will be the effect of the change in the estimated level of Government financial support for 1996–97, on *(a)* local government expenditure and *(b)* local government taxation. [8890]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend's provisional 1996–97 settlement proposals announced on 28 November provide for central Government support for local authority spending—through aggregate external finance—to rise by 2.1 per cent. to £2,517.4 million. This level of support represents 87.8 per cent. of total standard spending, compared with 88.6 per cent. in 1995–96.

Actual council tax levels depend also on local authorities' own budgetary decisions.

Butterflies

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new proposals he has to strengthen and enlarge the work of butterfly conservation through nature reserves and butterfly and moth conservation areas. [9294]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The statutory countryside agencies, including the Countryside Council for Wales, are jointly funding with the World Wide Fund for Nature a three-year project "Action for Butterflies". It is intended to produce action plans for the conservation of 25 species of butterfly. In addition, two sites containing the Marsh Fritillary—Rhos Llawr Cwrt and Gower Commons—have been submitted to the European Commission as candidate special areas of conservation under the habitats directive. The Countryside Council for Wales continues to support the establishment of local nature reserves, many of which contain significant butterfly and moth populations.

Nursery Education

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his most recent calculation of the proportion of Welsh families that have state nursery education available to them in each education authority for children aged *(a)* three to four years and *(b)* four to five years. [9352]

Mr. Richards: No calculations have been made on the basis of families. The following table shows the number of children at maintained nursery and primary schools at January 1995, with estimated ages at 31 December 1994, expressed as a percentage of the Registrar General's mid-1994 population estimates for three and four-year-olds.

Percentage of children at maintained nursery and primary schools, by LEA and by age

	Age	
LEA	*3 years*	*4 years*
Clwyd	63.4	98.5
Dyfed	43.4	86.7
Gwent	50.3	93.6
Gwynedd	23.2	75.2
Mid Glamorgan	52.9	91.9
Powys	26.8	87.1
South Glamorgan	38.2	80.4
West Glamorgan	72.7	99.2
Wales	49.7	90.2

Mobile Phones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what agreements his Department and its executive agencies have with companies for the provision of mobile and car phones; and if he will list the companies having these contracts, the duration of the contracts, the number of phones covered by each agreement and the cost to public funds of each agreement. [9770]

Mr. Hague: Welsh Office has no live contracts for the provision of mobile phones. Airtime contracts are presently held with:

	Number of phones
Astec Communications	13
BT	8
Cellular Communications Corporation	1
Martin Dawes Communications	3
Mercury Communications	1
Mobile Telecomms	6
Peoples Phone	100
Talkland International	4
Uniqueair	5
VHL Communications	1
VODACOMM	16

Airtime contracts for existing mobile phones are initially for 12 months from purchase date and following that period are reviewed competitively and let to ensure value for money.

Contract values are dependent on mobile phone usage.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what procedures were used by his Department in awarding contracts for the supply of mobile and car phones to his Department and its executive agencies; and which companies were involved in tendering for these contracts. [9771]

Mr. Hague: My Department's standard competitive tendering procedures are used for the purchase of mobile telephones and car phones. Companies invited to tender for the supply of mobile phones include Peoples Phone, Talkland, Martin Dawes, Uplands Communications, Avenguard Communications, Astec Communications and VHL.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what costs his Department and executive agencies have incurred as a result of withdrawing from contracts under which mobile phones are provided; and if he will list the companies concerned. [9772]

Mr. Hague: In the last three years we have paid £264 in penalties for terminating contracts early. The companies involved were Peoples Phone, Vodacom and Uniqueair.

Cardiff Bay (Birds)

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will announce his plans for bird compensation measures for the loss of the Cardiff site of special scientific interest; and when he expects these to be completed. [10410]

Mr. Hague: I am pleased to announce my plans to proceed immediately with bird reserve compensation measures at Uskmouth and Goldcliff and the area in between on the Gwent levels. These new proposals have been developed with the assistance of the Countryside Council for Wales, from the conclusions reached by the Cardiff Bay development corporation steering group report on alternative mitigation measures—October 1995—and discussed with the European Commission. I have placed a copy of the steering group report in the Library of the House.

I have asked the Cardiff Bay development corporation to set up immediately a project implementation steering group to oversee the establishment of the new integral reserve of over 375 hectares, with the firm objective of completion before the start of impoundment of the waters in Cardiff bay. The longer term objective is for the reserve to be developed so that it qualifies for special protection

area status. The first task of the group will be to provide clear proposals for the management of the site and by the end of May, specific targets for the birds to be attracted to it. The Land Authority for Wales, working on behalf of CBDC, has already secured from National Power 164 hectares of the land required and lodged a planning application for engineering works for the whole of the reserve site.

Animal Feedstuffs

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidelines the agricultural section of his Department gives to farmers and other workers in Wales with regard to the need to use gloves when handling animal feedstuffs; and if he will make a statement. [8693]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have been asked to reply.

The Health and Safety Executive has not issued specific guidelines concerning the use of gloves by farmers and other workers when handling animal feedstuffs. However, suppliers of animal feedstuffs have a duty to provide information regarding precautionary measures if the feedstuffs present a health hazard to people.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Engagements

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list her engagements for Monday 18 December and for Tuesday 19 December 1995. [8608]

Mrs. Bottomley *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* In addition to my parliamentary duties, I had a series of meetings with ministerial colleagues, officials and others.

Military Knights

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will identify each of the military knights of Windsor who occupy accommodation on the occupied royal palaces estate; and what is the total amount received in rents and other charges from the occupiers. [8906]

Mr. Sproat: There are 13 military knights in residence at Windsor castle. All the military knights are distinguished ex-service men.

The military knights, who receive no payment for performing their ceremonial duties, live rent free but are responsible for internal repairs and decorations. They have paid a total of £1,287 in charges for water from the Windsor castle waterworks for the financial year 1995–96. They are billed for other utilities by the suppliers and they pay council tax.

Royal Residences

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what resources have been provided from public funds for the maintenance of each of the royal residences in each year from 1992–93. [8912]

Mr. Sproat: The cost to my Department for the maintenance of each of the royal residences, since 1992–93, is as follows:

£ Million

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Buckingham Palace	1.103	1.326	2.380
Buckingham Palace Mews and Gardens	1.760	0.613	0.624
Kensington Palace	0.483	0.985	1.145
St. James's Palace	1.106	0.974	2.172
Clarence House and Marlborough House Mews	0.468	0.271	0.241
Hampton Court Mews and Paddocks	0.067	0.061	0.155
Windsor Castle	8.518	5.380	2.077
Windsor Castle Mews	0.198	0.137	0.372
Windsor Castle Homes and Great Park	0.463	0.361	0.483

The figures for Windsor Castle exclude fire restoration costs.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Turkeys

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he is taking to ensure that turkeys are reared and slaughtered humanely. [8721]

Mrs. Browning: Legislation is already in place to ensure that the welfare of turkeys is protected. We are currently considering the recommendations in the Farm Animal Welfare Council's report on turkeys which was published last year. We shall also participate actively in future discussions on the proposed Council of Europe recommendations on the welfare on turkeys.

Hedgerows

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many miles of hedgerows have been reinstated in the last four years; how many miles of hedgerows have been removed in each region; and at what cost in subsidy to public funds. [9606]

Mr. Clappison: I have been asked to reply.

Financial support for hedgerow restoration and planting is mainly provided through the Countryside Commission's countryside stewardship scheme, which incorporates the hedgerow incentive scheme, and MAFF's farm and conservation grant scheme.

The information requested in relation to countryside stewardship is set out in the table:

Agreement year (1 October–30 September)	*Length of hedgerow planted/reinstated (approximately)*	*Expenditure (approximately) £*
1992–93	142 miles (229 km)	410,169
1993–94	279 miles (449 km)	802,350
1994–95	487 miles (784 km)	1,522,087
1995–96	468 miles (754 km)	1,354,818

Comparable information in respect of the Farm and Conservation Grant Scheme is as follows:

Financial year	*Length of hedgerow planted/reinstated approximately*	*Expenditure approximately £*
1991–92	450 miles (735 km)	1,469,744
1992–93	570 miles (920 km)	1,839,446
1993–94	710 miles (1,146 km)	2,292,570
1994–95	530 miles (855 km)	1,709,479

Neither scheme provides assistance towards hedgerow removal.

Fish Stocks

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to commission studies into the artificial development of fish stocks by use of *(a)* discarded gas and oil structures, *(b)* protected closed areas and *(c)* other means and if he will make a statement. [8370]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* I see no justification for commissioning further studies of enhancement of marine fish stocks because work done so far, both in the United Kingdom and world-wide, suggests that such measures are rarely effective. On the specific suggestions made by the hon. Member.

(a) the development of artificial reefs has been shown to be feasible. However it has not been demonstrated that the use of artificial reefs necessarily leads to increases in stocks; it rather may lead to the aggregation of existing resources into a smaller, well defined area and make the fish easier to catch;

(b) I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 15 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *457*.

(c) there have been various attempts around the world at enhancing marine fish stocks through the release of juveniles but these have so far been largely unsuccessful. A particular problem is that reared fish have generally exhibited high mortality rates once released. The expert view is that overall, artificial additions to fish stocks can at best make only a small contribution to total stocks; and unless great care is taken with preparation and release, the reared fish may provide no more than expensive food for other species.

Equidae

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many organisations have been recognised in Britain to register equidae within the meaning of directive 90/426/EEC; [9349]

(2) if he will name the organisations in Britain which have been recognised to register equidae within the meaning of directive 90/426/EEC; and if he will make a statement about the welfare implications for equidae of such registration. [9350]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* Under EC Council directive 90/426, "registered equidae" means any equidae registered with those organisations or associations maintaining studbooks which have been formally recognised under the terms of EC Council directive 90/427. Recognition is voluntary. Thirty seven organisations have so far been recognised in the United Kingdom as follows:

The National Pony Society
British Miniature Horse Society
National Light Horse Breeding Society
Anglo-European Studbook Ltd.
British Warm-Blood Society
British Sports Horse Registry
Arab Horse Society
Weatherbys
British Horse Foundation
Shire Horse Society
Suffolk Horse Society
The British Andalusian Horse Society
Falabella Horse Breeders Association
Caspian Pony Society
Dales Pony Society
Hackney Horse Society
Exmoor Pony Society
Lusitano Breed Society of Great Britain
British Skewbald and Piebald Association
New Forest Pony Breeding and Cattle Society
British Appaloosa Society
The Spotted Horse and Pony Register
English Connemara Pony Society
The Dartmoor Pony Society
Irish Draught Horse Society
British Hanoverian Horse Society
International Miniature Pony Society
Welsh Pony and Cob Society
Donkey Breed Society
British Palomino Society
Fjord Horse Society of Great Britain
British Lipizzaner Horse Society
Shetland Pony Society
British Quarter Horse Association
Trakehner Breeders Fraternity
Eriskay Pony Society
Highland Pony Society.

The welfare implications for registered equidae are being considered. We will be discussing this with interested parties as part of our continuing consultations on the implementation of Council Directive 95/29/EC.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Minimum Wage

11. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the non-European countries which have minimum wage legislation. [7895]

Mr. Lang: The Government do not collect details of those countries throughout the world which have minimum wage legislation. However, the majority of research clearly shows that statutory minimum wages destroy jobs.

Citizens Advice Bureaux

20. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had with the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux on changes in the level of its services as a result of the budget he has allocated to it. [7908]

Mr. John M. Taylor: We have regular discussions with the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux about its funding and performance. I can announce today that the grant-in-aid available to the association for 1996–97 will be increased by £600,000 to a total of £12,516,000.

SWALEC (Takeover)

21. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received on the takeover of SWALEC by Dwr Cymru plc. [7909]

Mr. John M. Taylor: One representation has been received by my Department.

Landfill Tax

22. **Mr. Eric Clarke:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the impact of the landfill tax on the future of the coal industry. [7910]

Mr. Page: None, but I am aware that representations are being made by the industry. These will, of course, be taken fully into account before decisions are made on relevant aspects of the implementation of the tax.

Nuclear Waste

23. **Mr. Purchase:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much of the current liability for processing nuclear waste it is proposed that the British Energy Company will meet. [7911]

Mr. Eggar: The final decisions on the precise split of assets and liabilities between the company remaining in the public sector—Nuclear Electric plc, to be renamed Magnox Electric plc—and the two companies to be privatised—Scottish Nuclear Ltd. and Nuclear Electric Ltd., as subsidies of British Energy plc—have not yet been taken.

We have established the basic principle that assets will be followed by the associated liabilities.

Businesses, Suffolk

25. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what support is being given by his Department to businesses in Suffolk. [7913]

Mr. Page: My Department is supporting Business Link Suffolk and Business Link Norfolk and Waveney. Both business links opened recently and are now providing high quality services to local companies.

Central South Coast Region

26. **Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent representations he has received in support of a new central south coast region. [7914]

Mr. Eggar: I have not received any recent representations on this issue.

Industrial Investment Levels

27. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on investment levels in United Kingdom industry *(a)* from 1974 to 1979 and *(b)* since 1979. [7915]

Mr. Eggar: Between 1974 and 1979, total investment grew on average by 0.75 per cent. in real terms each year. Since 1979, it has grown by 1.75 per cent. on average in real terms each year.

Competitiveness

28. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures were proposed by Her Majesty's Government at the Madrid summit to improve the competitiveness of manufacturing and service industries in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* other member states. [7916]

Mr. Lang: The Madrid European Council discussed competitiveness on the basis of a report produced by the European Commission's competitiveness advisory group under the chairmanship of Dr. Ciampi. The United Kingdom endorsed, in particular, the emphasis which the report placed on: the need to ensure the effective implementation of the single market, including the introduction of competition into the utilities sector, the need to give effective support to small and medium enterprises, especially through the removal of regulatory obstacles, and the importance of Europe competing effectively with the United States and Asia. The United Kingdom also reiterated its commitment to making progress with trans-European networks.

Competitiveness (Environmental Appraisal)

Ms Ruddock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) how "Competitiveness: Forging Ahead" was modified by the results of any environmental appraisal undertaken by his Department; [8668]

(2) if "Competitiveness: Forging Ahead" has been subject to an environmental appraisal using the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment"; and if he will publish the appraisal; [8666]

(3) what procedures have been put in place by his Department to monitor the environmental impacts arising from the implementation of "Competitiveness: Forging Ahead"; [8669]

(4) what alternative courses of action from those detailed in "Competitiveness: Forging Ahead" were considered in any environmental appraisal undertaken by his Department. [8667]

Mr. Page: The 1994 White Paper "Competitiveness: Helping Business to Win" was the first comprehensive audit of the UK's competitive position. The 1995 White Paper "Competitiveness: Forging Ahead" updated the analysis, and it will be reviewed and developed further in the competitiveness White Paper due to be published later this year.

The White Papers have analysed the main factors influencing competitiveness. They identified the primary responsibility of companies themselves to improve their competitive performance. They also outlined policies and initiatives across the whole of Government to help create the right framework and conditions to foster that improvement.

Against this background, the White Papers considered the relationship between environmental issues and competitiveness. The 1995 White Paper sets out the implications for business of the Government's commitment to sustainable development. It addresses the way that tax and regulatory policies are used to achieve environmental objectives and identifies the challenges and opportunities for business managers. There was no specific, separate written environmental appraisal of the White Papers themselves. It is a matter for each Government Department and individual company to consider and monitor the environmental implications of their activities in the normal way—including, where appropriate, the need for a written environmental appraisal.

Responsibility for managing the competitiveness agenda within the Government now lies with my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, and the Office of Public Service in the Cabinet Office.

Business Links

29. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the introduction of business links. [7917]

Mr. Lang: Business links are making excellent progress in raising the quality of business support services and simplifying access to them. For the first time, businesses have a simple route to top quality public and price sector support—support delivered by local business for local business and tailored to the customer's individual needs. Across the country, thousands of companies, especially small firms with the desire and potential to grow, are experiencing the tangible benefits which business link offers—a single point of access to a complete range of support, including help with exports, innovation and technology, access to finance, sources of supply and so on.

The national business link network is nearing completion. With 176 outlets now operational, close to 80 per cent. of VAT registered firms in England can now benefit from the services of their local business link. Complete coverage is expected by April.

Mr. Pearson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of his Department's internal audit report into business links. [7902]

Mr. Page: This was a valuable report which has helped my Department to improve its management of the business link project. On 6 October 1995, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and Industry wrote to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) as the then Chairman of the Trade and Industry Committee, providing a memorandum which included details of progress and covering key issues identified by the report. I have asked my officials to seek the agreement of the Committee to placing the memorandum in the Library of the House.

Nuclear Electric

30. **Mr. Clapham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when it is expected that Nuclear Electric will be able to meet the full cost of its liabilities. [7919]

Mr. Eggar: The major part of Nuclear Electric's liabilities are in respect of long-term provisions for nuclear fuel reprocessing, waste management and decommissioning costs, a substantial part of which will not fall due for payment for a considerable number of years. After the privatisation of British Energy, the Government will ensure that Magnox Electric has sufficient assets to meet its liabilities as they fall due.

Research and Development

31. **Mr. Clelland:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many people are employed in civil research and development in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* the current year. [7920]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The information is not available for the years requested; 1993 is the latest year for which information is available and only total research and development figures were collected before 1990.

The total number of full-time equivalent persons engaged in research and development in the UK in 1978, 1990 and 1993, and the civil component for the latter two years were as follows:

	Total	*Civil*
1978	262,000	—
1990	280,000	231,000
1993	279,000	245,000

Communications Industry

32. **Mr. Pope:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps his Department is taking to promote the competitiveness of United Kingdom manufacturers and suppliers of communications networks and services. [7921]

Mr. Ian Taylor: My Department promotes the competitiveness of the communications industry through a series of initiatives, many in close co-operation with trade associations. These initiatives tackle a number of issues such as skill shortages, quality, and the use of new applications of technology to enhance productivity. In addition, we continue to pursue a licensing policy for telecommunications operators which has created one of the most competitive telecom services markets in the world. This has brought benefits both to consumers and to the industry itself since many UK companies which have proved themselves to be competitive here are now taking advantage of opportunities in expanding overseas markets.

Eurofighter

33. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had with the aerospace industry in relation to the United kingdom share of work in the Eurofighter project. [7922]

Mr. Eggar: My Department is staying in close touch with industry and, with the MOD, it is seeking to ensure a fair and realistic distribution of work in the Eurofighter project. My Department is also seeking to help secure the best conditions for UK industry's participation in Eurofighter through its own contacts with Governments and industry at home and abroad.

Small Business

34. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about his plans to promote small businesses. [7923]

Mr. Page: The Government are taking a number of measures to promote the interests of small businesses. These include:

- the establishment of the business link network which will offer advice and help to small and medium companies. By April 1996, every company in England will have access to a business link outlet and the range of services they offer;
- the creation of the small business Ministers forum to ensure that the issues and concerns of small businesses are addressed across Whitehall Departments.
- the current programme of "Your Business Matters" conferences being organised by the small firms' representative organisations is enabling small businesses themselves to have a direct say in the development of future Government policy for the sector. The outcomes of the conferences will be considered in this year's competitiveness White Paper.

Electricity Generation

5. **Mr. Chris Davies:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion of Britain's electricity is currently generated by power stations using *(a)* coal, *(b)* gas and *(c)* oil. [7889]

Mr. Eggar: In 1995, 50 per cent. of electricity in the United Kingdom was generated from coal, 15 per cent. from gas, and 5 per cent. from oil.

Private Finance Initiative

24. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the impact of the private finance initiative on industrial performance. [7912]

Mr. Lang: Although the private finance initiative is expected to have a beneficial effect on the economy by improving the efficiency and effectiveness of public sector procurement, no assessment has been made of its impact on industrial performance.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects the results of the Scott inquiry to be published. [8539]

Mr. Lang: I expect the report to be published within the next few weeks.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what agreements his Department and its executive agencies have with companies for the provision of mobile and car phones; and if he will list the companies having these contracts, the duration of the contracts, the number of phones covered by each agreement and the cost of public funds of each agreement; [9728]

(2) what procedures were used by his Department in awarding contracts for the supply of mobile and car phones to his Department and its executive agencies; and which companies were involved in tendering for these contracts; [9729]

(3) what costs his Department and executive agencies have incurred as a result of withdrawing from contracts under which mobile phones are provided; and if he will list the companies concerned. [9730]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Mobile and car phones are purchased locally in accordance with established Government procurement procedures. Although records of the contracts are not held centrally, it is estimated that, excluding next steps agencies, there are currently in the region of 800 mobile phones in use in my Department. These will have come from a variety of suppliers.

Similarly, there are no central records of costs incurred as a result of withdrawing from contracts under which mobile phones are provided.

Japanese Investment

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many Japanese companies have invested for the first time in the United Kingdom during the period April 1992 to the present; and what were the equivalent figures between *(a)* 1979 and 1983, *(b)* 1983 and 1987 and *(c)* 1987 and 1992. [7900]

Mr. Oppenheim: There are around 228 Japanese manufacturing investments in the UK. From April 1992 to the present, 32 Japanese manufacturing companies invested in the UK for the first time. The equivalent figures in the financial years 1979 to 1983, 1983 to 1987 and 1987 to 1992 were 12, 27 and 114 respectively. The UK has succeeded in attracting around 40 per cent. of all Japanese manufacturing investment into the European Union.

Sales and Auctions

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had with local authority organisations about the establishment of a system of advance notification and appropriate trader identification and record keeping for one-day sales or mock auctions. [9727]

Mr. John M. Taylor: My officials have periodically discussed the issues raised by particular one-day sales with trading standards officers. My officials will shortly meet the local authorities co-ordinating body on food and trading standards and other representatives of the trading standards service to review the situation. Mock auctions were made illegal by the Mock Auctions Act 1961.

Training and Enterprise Council

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list for each TEC *(a)* what grants it currently makes available for people starting up businesses, *(b)* how long those grants last, *(c)* what is the

monetary value of the grants, *(d)* what restrictions are placed on applying for the grant and *(e)* if the grant applies across the TEC geographical areas. [9194]

Mr. Page: The information requested is not held centrally for each TEC and could be obtained from them individually only at disproportionate cost.

Research Vessel Services Ltd.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consultations he has have with the chairman of the Natural Environment Research Council in relation to the impact of moving Research Vessel Services Ltd., from Barry to Southampton on the costs of oceanographic research. [8733]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* None. The cost in 1996 of operating the research vessel services from Southampton is expected to be less in real terms than the cost of operation from Barry in 1995.

The transfer to Southampton is an important element in the creation of a world-class centre in deep sea oceanography.

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Mr. McMaster: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what guidance he intends to issue to *(a)* Departments, *(b)* executive agencies, *(c)* non-departmental public bodies and *(d)* outside bodies and arms-length organisations which he has responsibility for, or an interest in, regarding the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if he will make a statement. [9234]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Department of Social Security is primarily responsible for the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, and I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply from my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People, 15 January 1996, *Official Report*, columns *417–18.*

I will ensure that my Department and any bodies for which it is responsible are reminded of their responsibilities under the Act.

Supermarkets

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has had on *(a)* profit margins of supermarkets and *(b)* references to the Office of Fair Trading of pricing policies by the supermarkets; and what studies his officials have made of these matters. [9463]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have received several representations concerning the profit margins and pricing policies of supermarkets, notably concerning bread, greengrocery products and turkeys.

The Office of Fair Trading keeps supermarket behaviour under review and has undertaken several inquiries into the pricing policies of large supermarkets, most recently in 1992. The director general has not concluded that action under the competition legislation was appropriate.

Part-time Workers

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what initiatives have been taken, and at what cost, to publicise the changes in qualifying periods for employment rights for part-time workers to *(a)* employees and *(b)* employers. [9600]

Mr. John M. Taylor: My right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Employment announced in response to a written parliamentary question on 20 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *1100–01* that regulations removing qualifying hours of work thresholds for employment rights would shortly be introduced. On the same day, the former Employment Department issued a detailed press notice about these changes which were widely reported in the press and professional journals. The changes were also covered in the February 1995 issue of the "Employment Gazette". The costs of these publicity items cannot be isolated from normal Departmental running costs.

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will estimate the number of people *(a)* killed and *(b)* injured as a result of carbon monoxide poisoning in (i) 1993, (ii) 1994, and (iii) 1995. [9618]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* The annual totals of people in Great Britain accidentally killed by carbon monoxide from flammable gas, as recorded by the Health and Safety Executive, are:

Year	*Number of fatalities* [1]
1993	31
1994	[2]30
1995	n/a

[1] The totals do not include fatalities from carbon monoxide generated by solid fuel and oil. These figures are not yet available from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.
[2] Provisional.
n/a = no figures yet available.

The estimated annual number of people injured in the United Kingdom as a result of accidental carbon monoxide poisoning are as follows:

	Heating–appliance related	*Not heating–appliance related*	*Total*[1]
1993	105	42	147
1994	211	273	485
1995	n/a	n/a	n/a

[1] Estimates from the DTI Home Accident Surveillance System, which excludes accidents in the work place.
n/a = no estimates yet available.

Nuclear Power (Environmental Appraisal)

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) how "Prospects for Nuclear Power in the UK" (Cm 2860) was modified by the results of any environmental appraisal undertaken by his Department; [8656]

(2) if "Prospects for Nuclear Power in the UK" (Cm 2860) has been subject to an environmental appraisal using the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" produced by the Department of the Environment; and if he will publish the appraisal; [8654]

(3) what procedures have been put in place by his Department to monitor the environmental impacts arising from the implementation of "Prospects for Nuclear Power in the UK" (Cm 2860); [8657]

(4) what alternative courses of action from those detailed in "Prospects for Nuclear Power in the UK" (Cm 2860) were considered in any environmental appraisal undertaken by his Department. [8655]

Mr. Page: The environmental implications of the Government's proposals were addressed as part of the nuclear review and details of the conclusions reached were published in the White Paper.

SCOTLAND

World Heritage Site (Cairngorms)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to submit the application for the Cairngorms to be designated a world heritage site, and if he will make a statement. [8474]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend has asked the Cairngorms Partnership Board to prepare the case for world heritage site listing for the Cairngorms in 1997, once the agreed management strategy for the area, on which so much rests, has been published in its final form towards the end of this year.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Williams Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many mobile telephones have been contracted to his Department in each of the last eight years; and in each of those years how many different suppliers were involved. [9132]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Four mobile phones were hired from one supplier for periods up to one month in 1995. No phones were hired in the previous seven years.

Heart Transplants

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of heart transplants carried out in 1995. [8942]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The number of heart transplants carried out in Scottish NHS hospitals in 1995 was 32.

Severe Weather Conditions

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to make additional resources available to Scottish local authorities to tackle the damage caused by the recent severe weather conditions, [8940]

Mr. Kynoch: So far as the Bellwin scheme is concerned, I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend gave to the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) on 10 January, *Official Report*, columns *235–38*.

The Bellwin scheme does not relate to capital expenditure, but I recognise that local authorities may have to incur additional capital expenditure as a result of the recent severe weather. Any representations from authorities facing serious difficulties in this regard will be sympathetically considered in the light of available resources.

Central European Time

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to publish the preliminary conclusions of his analysis of the introduction of central European time on road accident casualties in Scotland; if he will immediately publish the methodology on which this analysis has been based; and what consultations his officials have had with the Transport Research Laboratory in the course of this study. [9454]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Scottish Office statisticians have published a report outlining the methodology used in their analysis of the likely effect on road accident casualties in Scotland following the introduction of central European time. Their interim conclusions are that such a change would be broadly neutral in terms of total road accident casualties in Scotland. Copies of the report are being placed in the Libraries of both Houses. My statisticians have met statisticians from the Transport Research Laboratory and the Department of Transport, most recently on 20 December 1995, to discuss the methodologies used for estimating casualty savings from adopting central European time.

I have arranged for this information to be made available to the Department of Transport and the Transport Research Laboratory.

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what guidance he intends to issue to *(a)* Departments, *(b)* executive agencies, *(c)* non-departmental public bodies and *(d)* outside bodies and arms-length organisations which he has responsibility for, or an interest in, regarding the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if he will make a statement; [9235]

(2) what guidance he intends to issue to local authorities about the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if he will make a statement; [9244]

(3) what guidance he intends to issue to health authorities and trusts about the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if he will make a statement. [9240]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People on 15 January, *Official Report*, column *417*.

I will ensure that officials in the Scottish Office and all bodies for which it is responsible are made aware of their responsibilities under the Act.

Scottish Defence Initiative

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made on the Scottish defence initiative; and what proposals he has to extend it. [9406]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* The Scottish defence initiative was introduced by Scottish Enterprise as a response to expected reductions in defence expenditure. Progress on the initiative is consequently a matter for that organisation. I have asked the chairman of Scottish Enterprise to write to the hon. Member.

Business Purchases (Imports)

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of Scottish business purchases were imported from *(a)* elsewhere in the United Kingdom and *(b)* other countries; and if he will provide a breakdown by sector. [9567]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* The only data source which provides information on Scottish imports by industry is the Scottish input-output tables for 1989. A copy of this publication will shortly be placed in the House of Commons Library. A summary of the imports data contained in these tables is set out in the table:

	Purchases	
Industry	*Percentage rest of UK*	*Percentage rest of world*
Agriculture	17.6	11.7
Forestry	10.6	2.5
Fishing	14.3	8.5
Energy and water supply	25.1	29.6
Metal manufacturing	27.2	30.8
Other minerals and mineral production	26.8	14.4
Chemicals and man-made fibres	38.1	16.7
Metal goods	36.1	18.0
Mechanical engineering	28.5	21.5
Electrical and instrument engineering	50.1	31.2
Transport Equipment	35.2	25.7
Food, drink and tobacco	20.0	10.4
Textiles, leather, footwear and clothing	29.6	17.3
Paper, printing and publishing	25.3	36.3
Other manufacturing	33.9	19.1
Construction	30.4	8.4
Distribution	21.6	5.5
Transport and communication	33.5	16.3
Finance and business services	42.4	3.3
Other services	21.2	14.4
Public administration	—	—
Total Scottish industry	29.7	18.5

Source:
Scottish input-output tables for 1989.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what will be the effect of the change in the estimated level of Government financial support for 1996–97, on *(a)* local government expenditure and *(b)* local government taxation. [8889]

Mr. Kynoch: This information is not yet available and will depend on decisions still to be taken by individual local authorities regarding their 1996–97 budgets and council tax levels.

Oil Pollution

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the final figures for recovered losses of birds and mammals arising from oil pollution in the Shetland Isles as a result of the MV Braer incident. [8903]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The information requested is contained in the report of the ecological steering group "The Environmental Impact of the Wreck of the Braer" (The Scottish Office, 1994), a copy of which is in the Library.

Butterflies and Moths

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what new proposals he has to strengthen and enlarge the work of butterfly conservation through nature reserves and butterfly and moth conservation areas. [9301]

Mr. Kynoch: Following publication of the UK biodiversity action plan steering group report last December, my right hon. Friend is currently considering proposals to enhance the conservation of butterfly and moth species occurring in Scotland. Requirements for habitat creation and specific conservation areas will be taken forward in the context of the Government's commitment to the UN convention on biological diversity.

Cairngorms

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much his Department spent on commissioning the report of the working party on the future of the Cairngorms; and how long it took to produce its report. [9569]

Mr. Kynoch: Spending on the Cairngorms working party, including the cost of working party meetings, publication of a consultation paper by the working party in May 1992, all consultancy fees and the costs of producing the working party's final report and associated documents, totalled £127.650. The working party was set up in March 1991 and its report was published on 26 March 1993.

Irvine Development Corporation

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to announce the names of the landlords who will be allowed onto the ballots for the properties currently owned by Irvine development corporation. [9843]

Mr. Kynoch: I refer to the answer given to the hon. Member on 19 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *1067*.

Housing

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what sums Scottish Homes has spent since its establishment on the development of housing associations; and if he will list those associations which have received funding from Scottish Homes and the amounts paid to each of them; [9844]

(2) if he will list the result of each ballot undertaken by Scottish Homes as part of its programme of stock transfers; and if he will indicate for each ballot (i) the

number of tenants voting *(a)* in favour of and *(b)* against the stock transfer, (ii) the total number of tenants eligible to vote in each ballot, (iii) the percentage of tenants voting in favour of transferring to another landlord and (iv) the name of the successful bidding organisation in each case. [9846]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The information requested is a matter for Scottish Homes. I have asked the chairman, Sir James Mellon, to write to the hon. Member with the relevant information.

Commercial Properties (Revaluations Appeals)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many appeals were lodged against the recent revaluations of commercial properties by each regional and island council; what was the number and percentage of appeals which have been dealt with; how many and what percentage of appeals have been successful; and what is the average amount of time taken to deal with an appeal. [9845]

Mr. Kynoch: The following table gives a provisional count, by assessors, of the number of appeals lodged against the 1995 revaluation of rateable values of all non-domestic subjects throughout Scotland. The information was gathered as at 15 December 1995, the date by which such appeals must be lodged. No information is available on the number of appeals by type of subject.

It is too early in the process to gather meaningful information about the progress of appeals. Regular, quarterly, information on the number and progress of appeals will be gathered from the end of March 1996.

	Number of appeals[1] lodged against the 1995 revaluation
Scotland	103,049
Borders	1,938
Central	5,494
Dumfries and Galloway	3,025
Fife	6,196
Grampian	10,286
Highland	5,589
Lothian	13,328
Strathclyde	48,436
Tayside	7,978
Orkney	174
Shetland	285
Western Isles	320

Note:

[1] It is possible for both owner and tenant to appeal in relation to the same property. The analysis shows the total number of appeals. Assessors estimate that these appeals relate to just over 94,000 separate properties.

Source:

Information supplied by Assessors.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the circulars his Department had issued up until 1 January 1996 in respect of current local government reforms in Scotland. [9847]

Mr. Kynoch: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 23 November 1995, *Official Report*, columns *68–70*. Since then, the following seven circulars related to reorganisation of local government have been issued.

Local Government Finance

Finance Circular 24/1995: 1996–97 Capping Regime: Report specifying notional amounts.

Circular Letter: The Local Government (Application of Enactments) (No. 2) Order 1995.

Planning

SODD Circular No. 25/1995: Designation of Structure Plan Areas (Scotland) Order 1995.

Industry

SOEID Circular No. 14/1995: Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994—Economic Development Powers.

Social Work

SWSG 21/1995: Community Care Planning: Joint Planning Structures.

Police

Circular on Police Amalgamation Schemes.

Fire

Circular on Fire Administration Schemes.

Health Boards (Competitive Tendering)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what safeguards exist to ensure that contracts for goods or services are awarded in a proper way by health boards or NHS trusts in Scotland when these contracts are not awarded by competitive tendering. [9848]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There is a statutory requirement on all health boards and national health service trusts to undergo an end-year audit by external auditors to ensure that the trust's standing financial instructions, and any other financial instructions determined by the management executive of the national health service in Scotland, have been complied with.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland at what level *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* health boards and NHS trusts in Scotland are obliged to enter into a competitive tendering exercise before agreeing a contract for goods or services. [9849]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Local authorities make their own standing orders covering financial probity in the handling of contracts and other matters. They are required to submit certain services to compulsory competitive tendering. As a result of local government reform, most of the compulsory competitive tendering requirements have been temporarily suspended, with the exception of construction contracts over £500,000.

Health boards and NHS trusts are required to include in their standing financial instructions detailed procedures on the procurement of goods, services and works by competitive tendering or other means. These instructions include the setting of locally agreed thresholds above which quotations or formal tenders must be obtained.

Local authorities and health boards and NHS trusts must also have regard to EC procurement directives, including the thresholds for the advertising of contracts.

Intensive Care Beds

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what was *(a)* the number of intensive care beds within each health board area, *(b)* the number of

people living within each board area and *(c)* the ratio of patients to intensive care beds in each financial year since 1979–80; [9841]

(2) what steps his Department has taken to increase the number of intensive care beds available in Scotland and the effectiveness of the intensive care system with particular reference to rural areas. [9842]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The tables show the number of intensive care beds by health board area of treatment, the estimated population resident in each health board area and the average number of patients discharged per available staffed beds by health board area of treatment.

It is for individual health boards and NHS trusts to ensure an appropriate level of intensive care bed provision to meet the needs of their population. The clinical resource and audit group and the Scottish management efficiency group produced a report in 1991 which made a number of recommendations relating to the effectiveness of adult intensive care such as the staffing of intensive care units and the piloting of guidelines for admission and discharge. A survey of intensive care facilities in all Scottish health board areas, which was carried out by the Scottish Office in August 1995, showed that health boards keep the need for intensive care services in their areas under review. I have asked general managers of health boards to continue to monitor the provision and use of intensive care facilities.

NHSiS—Intensive care beds[1]: by health board area of treatment: Years ending 31 March

	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
Scotland	135	137	142	159	166	168	166	166
Argyll and Clyde	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	3
Ayrshire and Arran	5	5	5	7	10	8	6	8
Borders	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dumfries and Galloway	—	—	2	8	8	8	8	8
Fife	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Forth Valley	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Grampian	6	6	6	6	10	11	11	11
Greater Glasgow	72	72	74	80	81	81	81	80
Highland	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	6
Lanarkshire	15	15	16	19	19	20	19	18
Lothian	12	12	12	12	11	12	12	14
Orkney	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Shetland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tayside	13	14	14	14	15	15	16	15
Western Isles	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Scotland	166	182	188	198	219	230	250	247
Argyll and Clyde	1	—	—	—	4	7	12	13
Ayrshire and Arran	6	6	6	6	7	8	8	8
Borders	—	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Dumfries and Galloway	8	8	8	8	8	8	16	14
Fife	—	—	—	—	—	—	5	6
Forth Valley	4	4	9	9	9	9	9	9
Grampian	11	10	10	10	10	11	10	11
Greater Glasgow	75	76	78	77	77	77	75	75
Highland	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
Lanarkshire	19	24	31	35	37	37	37	37
Lothian	21	30	25	28	38	41	41	40
Orkney	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Shetland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tayside	15	15	15	15	20	24	28	25
Western Isles	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Note:
[1] Average available staffed beds in the speciality of intensive therapy unit.
Source:
ISD(S)1.

NHSIS—Estimated Population resident in Health boards in Scotland: As at 30 June

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Scotland	5,167,000	5,153,300	5,180,200	5,166,800	5,152,600	5,145,602	5,136,900	5,123,000
Argyll and Clyde	480,653	459,282	455,045	452,700	450,700	448,000	447,200	445,300
Ayrshire and Arran	376,027	375,759	377,854	377,000	376,600	376,700	376,200	376,200
Borders	99,938	99,510	101,256	101,100	101,100	101,300	101,700	101,700
Dumfries and Galloway	142,547	142,465	145,502	145,400	145,400	145,500	145,600	145,400

NHSIS—Estimated Population resident in Health boards in Scotland: As at 30 June

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Fife	340,170	340,341	341,589	342,500	344,200	345,900	346,200	346,600
Forth Valley	271,177	271,210	273,515	273,300	273,100	273,200	272,900	272,500
Grampian	469,168	471,944	464,899	490,400	494,500	498,000	501,600	504,500
Greater Glasgow	1,023,083	1,012,041	1,007,325	996,700	986,600	978,200	968,600	960,500
Highland	190,507	191,188	194,903	195,000	195,700	196,702	197,800	199,000
Lanarkshire	571,338	571,737	574,589	573,100	571,800	570,700	568,500	565,300
Lothian	750,728	748,603	749,591	749,100	745,900	746,400	745,900	743,100
Orkney	16,134	18,030	19,182	19,100	19,200	19,200	19,200	19,100
Shetland	22,111	22,309	26,347	24,100	22,300	22,200	22,300	22,400
Tayside	401,661	399,191	397,055	395,800	394,100	392,400	392,100	390,500
Western Isles	29,758	29,681	31,548	31,600	31,400	31,200	31,100	31,000

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Scotland	5,112,604	5,093,414	5,096,628	5,102,296	5,107,000	5,111,200	5,120,200	5,132,400
Argyll and Clyde	442,700	441,300	440,000	439,518	437,400	434,300	432,800	433,000
Ayrshire and Arran	376,400	376,000	376,400	376,700	376,900	376,600	376,800	377,000
Borders	102,000	102,304	102,810	103,616	104,100	104,800	105,300	105,700
Dumfries and Galloway	145,504	145,700	147,100	147,630	147,700	147,900	147,900	147,800
Fife	346,700	346,600	347,600	348,800	349,400	349,900	351,200	352,100
Forth Valley	272,800	272,200	272,104	273,020	272,900	272,700	272,900	273,400
Grampian	504,600	503,500	507,600	510,200	515,600	522,400	528,100	532,500
Greater Glasgow	952,200	940,400	932,700	924,500	922,600	918,200	915,700	916,600
Highland	198,700	199,510	200,614	202,612	204,100	205,900	206,900	207,500
Lanarkshire	564,200	561,900	562,200	562,700	561,300	561,600	561,400	561,200
Lothian	744,600	742,900	747,100	750,300	751,000	750,600	753,900	758,600
Orkney	19,100	19,200	19,300	19,400	19,560	19,710	19,760	19,810
Shetland	22,400	22,300	22,200	22,400	22,540	22,640	22,830	22,880
Tayside	390,200	389,300	388,900	391,100	392,500	394,600	395,200	395,000
Western Isles	30,500	30,300	30,000	29,800	29,400	29,350	29,410	29,310

Source:
Registrar General for Scotland.

NHSIS—Intensive care units[1]—average number of patients discharged per available staffed bed; By health board area of treatment: Years ending 31 March

	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
Scotland	66	68	71	72	69	72	75	77
Argyll and Clyde	96	106	113	103	101	100	111	119
Ayrshire and Arran	145	146	138	70	32	42	57	44
Borders	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dumfries and Galloway	—	—	90	94	100	102	107	107
Fife	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Forth Valley	122	116	116	113	115	127	116	128
Grampian	13	12	18	7	28	28	31	32
Greater Glasgow	57	58	60	65	67	66	67	68
Highland	88	92	100	97	93	94	100	102
Lanarkshire	57	62	65	62	64	64	67	73
Lothian	92	104	107	117	101	111	123	123
Orkney	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Shetland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tayside	61	62	64	70	71	74	82	79
Western Isles	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Scotland	[2]77	80	86	94	[2]98	99	92	94
Argyll and Clyde	n/s	—	—	—	n/s	135	101	83
Ayrshire and Arran	68	81	72	93	85	91	88	84
Borders	—	43	[illegible]	65	83	95	97	93
Dumfries and Galloway	125	148	[illegible]	150	181	180	105	116
Fife	—	—	—	—	—	—	59	64
Forth Valley	129	115	82	97	97	97	85	81
Grampian	29	42	57	66	72	65	44	43
Greater Glasgow	78	81	81	84	84	83	84	80

	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Highland	111	113	113	119	111	122	116	135
Lanarkshire	70	77	77	95	96	98	90	92
Lothian	64	70	102	118	108	103	106	107
Orkney	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Shetland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tayside	82	82	88	97	128	119	112	112
Western Isles	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Notes:
[1] Activity in the speciality of intensive therapy unit.
[2] Excludes Argyll and Clyde.
n/s = Not shown—the figures for 1988 and 1992 are not shown because of concern over the accuracy of available data.
Source:
ISD(S)1.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Roads (Newtownards)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his Department's assessment of the bank at 114 Crawfordsburn road, Newtownards. [8526]

Mr. Moss: The bank in question reduces the sightlines for vehicles emerging from the private lane serving the property in question.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will take steps to level the bank at 114 Crawfordsburn road, Newtownards. [8499]

Mr. Moss: The Department does not own the bank in question and has no proposals to level it.

Multiple Occupancy Property

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will introduce legislation to require the owners or agents responsible for letting a house or property for multiple occupancy to register the property with the local authority and obtain approval for multiple occupancy or group tenancy before letting out the property; [8468]

(2) if he will introduce legislation to require that all existing properties leased for multiple occupancy or group tenancy provide adequate safeguards to ensure the safety of occupants as deemed necessary by an expert on fire risk. [8469]

Mr. Moss: The housing policy review consultative document "Building on Success", a copy of which is in the Library, confirms that consideration is being given as to how best to bring about improvement in the safety and quality of houses in multiple occupancy in Northern Ireland. When the consultation process is complete, final decisions will then be taken on further legislative provision in this sector.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action has been taken by the Department of the Environment to ensure that adequate fire safety arrangements are now in place in accommodation offered by the private sector for group and multiple occupancy. [8470]

Mr. Moss: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. Under the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1992, the Housing Executive has a responsibility to inspect standards of accommodation and fire safety in houses in multiple occupation. The chief executive of the Housing Executive has advised me that it maintains a register of HMOs. If on inspection a property does not meet appropriate standards, including adequate fire safety arrangements, the executive is empowered to require the landlord to ensure that (i) the number of persons occupying the premises is appropriate for the facilities (ii) the premises are made fit and (iii) have adequate fire safety arrangements. As required by legislation, the Northern Ireland Fire Authority is consulted about the adequacy of means of escape from fire. The Housing Executive is also the authority to close all or part of the premises if the conditions are not met.

Housing Benefit (Private Landlords)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the 10 private landlords who received most in terms of indirect payments of housing benefit last year and the amounts involved. [8498]

Mr. Moss: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Butterflies and Moths

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what new proposals he has to strengthen and expand the work of moth and butterfly conservation through nature reserves and conservation areas. [9295]

Mr. Moss: Moth and butterfly conservation in Northern Ireland will continue to benefit from the ongoing programme of site protection through the declaration and management of areas of special scientific interest and nature reserves.

There are now 85 ASSIs covering 75,327 hectares. These already include many of Northern Ireland's most important butterfly and moth sites. The target date for the completion of the declaration of ASSIs throughout Northern Ireland is 2001. Several new nature reserves are also proposed, some of which will be important for moths and butterflies.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what will be the effect of the change in the estimated level of Government financial support for 1996–97 on *(a)* local government expenditure and *(b)* local government taxation. [8892]

Mr. Moss: The resources available for general Exchequer grant for 1996–97 are equal to the original provision for 1995–96: £40.226 million. However, in 1995–96 a special once-only allocation of £2 million was provided to district councils to help kick-start the promotion of local economic development.

Roads Programme

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans his Department has to review its roads programme when road projects have been cancelled; and if the criteria used in re-assessing individual road schemes have been adjusted in concert with those of the Department of Transport. [8497]

Mr. Moss: The roads programme is reviewed annually following the outcome of the public expenditure survey and adjustments are made to reflect the funds allocated. The criteria used to re-assess schemes are consistent with those used by the Department of Transport.

Housing (Heating and Insulation)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the policy of his Department and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in relation to utilising double glazing in new housing and the installation of oil-fired central heating in both new and existing houses. [8496]

Mr. Moss: Energy conservation and the efficient use of energy resources are a Government priority. Since 1 April 1995 it has been the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's policy, approved by the Department, to install double glazing in all its new housing.

The installation of oil-fired central heating for the executive's existing houses is currently under review. However, with effect from 1 April 1996, its policy, approved by the Department, is to include oil heating as a option for all new-built houses.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list all qualitative and quantitative research projects and surveys carried out for his Department into aspects of public attitudes and opinions *(a)* in general and *(b)* in relation to specific policy proposals in each of the past three years to December 1995, indicating for each project or survey (i) the date on which the research was commissioned, (ii) the amount which his Department spent, (iii) who carried out the research, (iv) the number of people surveyed or taking part, (v) the location and time scale and (vi) which individuals and organisations have been given access to the findings. [5981]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Schools (Parental Choice)

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the role of parental choice in determining the school that a child can attend. [9464]

Mrs. Gillan: Parents have the right to express a preference for the school that they wish their child to attend. In most cases, that preference must be met if places are available. As a result of the Government's reforms, parents now have more rights, much better information, and access to many more kinds of schools.

Pupil Selection

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many schools applied for the right to select up to 10 per cent. of their pupils following the guidelines in her Department's circular 6/93; and what are the criteria under which the right to select was sought. [8969]

Mrs. Gillan: Local education authority-maintained schools do not have to seek the Secretary of State's approval to introduce such arrangements.

Some 43 grant-maintained schools have secured the Secretary of State's agreement to select up to 10 per cent. of their pupils on the basis of aptitude or ability in a particular subject or combination of subjects. Of these, 23 wished to select by reference to aptitude or ability in music alone, 17 by music and one or more other subjects, and three by technology.

Nottingham Schools (Funding)

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the capital funding allocations to grant-maintained schools and the CTC in Nottingham for 1996–97. [9404]

Mrs. Gillan: Decisions on city technology colleges' capital allocations for 1996–97 have not yet been taken. Capital allocations to individual grant-maintained schools are a matter for the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked the chairman of the agency to write to the hon. Member.

Sports (Disabled People)

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on her Department's policy in relation to the development of sports for disabled people. [9216]

Mr. Robin Squire: The revised national curriculum for physical education provides teachers with sufficient flexibility to respond to the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs. It was drafted so that specific interpretation or modification is required for as few pupils with special educational needs as possible. The revised curriculum also enables teaching material to be selected from an earlier or later key stage where a teacher considers it necessary to enable pupils to progress and demonstrate achievement.

The sport policy statement, "Raising the Game", which was launched in July last year, sets out the Government's proposals for rebuilding the strength of British sport. That statement applies equally to all schools and the Government intend that the measures and

recommendations set out in it will be interpreted or adapted for all sportsmen and sportswomen, regardless of their individual circumstances.

Nursery Education

Mr. Khabra: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will give the Government's estimate of the extra administrative cost to Ealing council and each of the relevant schools within the borough boundary of administering the proposed nursery voucher scheme. [9384]

Mr. Robin Squire: An agency will administer the issue and redemption of nursery education vouchers. We are working with the voucher agency in phase one to ensure that the burdens on schools and local authorities are kept to a minimum.

Bluecoat School, Liverpool

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she received an application from the Bluecoat school, Liverpool about exchanges in admissions criteria; what length of time it usually takes to determine such applications; when she expects to make a decision; and if she will make a statement. [9674]

Mrs. Gillan: The governors' proposals to change the admission criteria for the Bluecoat school, Liverpool, were published on 28 January 1995. We normally aim to take decisions on all statutory proposals within five months of their publication, though in some cases a longer period is needed if full consideration is to be given to all relevant facts. My right hon. Friend will announce a decision on these proposals as soon as possible.

GEST

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what are the national allocations under the grants for education support and training programme for 1996–97. [9563]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following table sets out the national allocations under the grants for education support and training programme for 1996–97. Fuller details were set out in the Department's press notice dated 5 January, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Grants for education support and training (GEST) 1996–97 programme

1996–97 funding

Grant number	*Grant title*	*£ million*
1(a)	School Effectiveness	131.9
1(b)	School Improvement Initiative	1.2
2(a)	NC Assessment—Verification	8.4
2(b)	NC Assessment—Supply Cover	16.8
3(a)	Primary Teachers' Subject Knowledge	16.9
3(b)	Assessment Training for Primary School Teachers	3.0
4	Training for Special Educational Needs	10.4
5	Development of School SEN Policies	10.2
6	Development of SEN Parent Partnership Scheme	4.0
7	Licensed and Overseas Trained Teachers	0.4

Grants for education support and training (GEST) 1996–97 programme

1996–97 funding

Grant number	*Grant title*	*£ million*
8(a)	Vocational Qualifications—Post 16	9.7
	Vocational Qualifications—Pre 16	1.5
8(b)	Vocational Qualifications—Pilot Part Ones	3.5
9(a) and 9(b)	Truancy and Disaffected Pupils	14.0
9(c)	Pupil Behaviour and Discipline	3.0
10	Training in Youth and Community Work	2.2
11	Bilingual Pupils	5.9
12	Training for Careers Teachers	4.1
13(a)	Drug Prevention and Schools—(Formula)	4.5
13(b)	Drug Prevention and Schools—(Bid)	1.4
14[1]	Specialist Schools	5.7
15(a)[1]	Literacy and Numeracy Centres	3.5
15(b)	Literacy and Numeracy (support)	1.5
	Programme total	263.7

[1] To be funded at 100 per cent., all others at 60 per cent. grant rate.

Helplines

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list all the helplines, or schemes which include a helpline service, for which her Department provides any funding, stating which are *(a)* independent organisations, *(b)* run by her Department or agencies of her Department or *(c)* of another classification; how many calls each received in each of the last five years; and how much money each received from her Department in each of the last five years. [9799]

Mr. Robin Squire: Until the merger of July 1995, the Education and the Employment Departments operated independently, and will continue to do so for publicity purposes until the end of this financial year.

Records are not held centrally of helplines funded by the former Employment Department, including some set up in partnership with the former Department for Education.

Details of education helplines funded in the last five years are as follows:

Helplines run by the Department

Grant-maintained Schools

A six-week information helpline pilot in 1993, set up by the Department, received 2,500 calls at a cost of £25,000. The service was then provided by the Department's own staff, receiving a further 2,098 calls in 1993, 1,960 calls in 1994, and 1,540 in 1995. As servicing the helpline is part of many other duties, costs for operating this service following the pilot cannot be separated out.

Nursery Education

A nursery education helpline was set up by the Department in November 1995. To date, 5,000 calls have been received at an estimated cost of £16,000.

Helplines run by Agencies for the Department

The Teacher Training Agency set up a helpline for individuals wishing to go into teaching in August 1995. To date, around 7,980 calls and more than 3,530 letters have been received at a cost of £115,000.

The Funding Agency for Schools set up a helpline for schools in January 1996, in response to the recent survey of the condition of school buildings. Costs have yet to be finalised.

Literacy and Numeracy Centres

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will give a breakdown of the costs of the primary literacy and numeracy centres for 1996–97, indicating what amounts will be available for *(a)* capital and *(b)* running costs. [9564]

Mr. Robin Squire: The new grants for education, support and training programme specific grant will provide for £5 million of expenditure in 1996–97. The breakdown between capital and running costs will depend on the nature of successful bids from local education authorities.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what training each TEC makes available for small business start-ups; how many training places for start-ups are currently available; and what were the equivalent figures for each financial year since the TECs began. [9196]

Mr. Paice: The single regeneration budget allows training and enterprise councils and their local partners to provide training as part of an integrated programme of support for small business start-ups. In addition, TECs can use training for work budgets to help unemployed people who wish to become self-employed. The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what procedures were used by her Department in awarding contracts for the supply of mobile and car phones to her Department and its executive agencies; and which companies were involved in tendering for these contracts. [9762]

Mr. Robin Squire: Contracts for the supply of mobile and car phones for the Department and for the Teachers' Pensions Agency are awarded through value for money comparisons—for low-value orders below £500—and competitive tender for higher value contracts.

The following companies have tendered:

BT

Vodac

Direct Mobile

Cellcom

Peoples Phone

4U Ltd.

Martin Dawes.

The Employment Service has had a framework agreement for the supply of mobile and car phones with Vodac for the past four years. Work is currently in hand to run a competition to put in place a single framework agreement which will be used by the Department and its executive agencies.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what agreements her Department and its executive agencies have with companies for the provision of mobile and car phones; and if he will list the companies having these contracts, the duration of the contracts, the number of phones covered by each agreement and the cost to public funds of each agreement. [9761]

Mr. Squire: The information sought is set out in the table, as far as it is readily available, in respect of centrally managed contracts.

Company	*Number of phones*	*Agreement fixed charges* £
BT	77	23,500
Vodac	52	14,200
Direct Mobile	1	300
Cellcom	9	3,000
Peoples Phone	29	15,000
4U Ltd.	5	1,700
Vodac—employment service framework agreement	1,129	297,474

1. Contracts for mobile and car phones are for a minimum of one years duration.

2. Details of call charges are not readily available and would involve disproportionate cost to provide.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what costs her Department and executive agencies have incurred as a result of withdrawing from contracts under which mobile phones are provided; and if he will list the companies concerned. [9763]

Mr. Squire: The Department has no record of incurring costs as a result of withdrawing from mobile and car phone contracts, nor have either of its executive agencies—the Employment Service and the Teachers' Pensions Agency.

Homework Clubs

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received about the development of homework clubs; and if she will make a statement. [8091]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department has received representations about out-of-school activities, including homework centres, from the Prince's Trust and from Education Extra. The Department contributed towards the cost of a conference on study support out-of-school hours organised by the Prince's Trust in November 1995, and is discussing possible further developments with the trust.

Disability Discrimination

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 9 January, *Official Report*, column *147*, when her Department or the then Department of Employment first became aware of the fact that 96 per cent. of employers would not be covered by the employment provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; what plans she has to amend the Act to involve more employers; and what is her current estimate of unemployment amongst disabled people. [9726]

Mrs. Gillan: The Government first consulted on the possible introduction of a new statutory right of non-discrimination against disabled people in the document "A Consultation on Government measures to Tackle Discrimination Against Disabled People", published in July 1994. The document sought views on the exclusion of firms with fewer than 20 employees. In preparing that document, the Government were aware that about 95 per cent. of employers would not be covered by legislation if such small employers were excluded, but that about 80 per cent. of employees work for employers who would be within the legislation.

The Government have no immediate plans to amend the Disability Discrimination Act to bring more employers within its scope. However, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment is required under the Act to review section 7 of the Act—the small firms exemption—within five years of its coming into force, and to give Parliament the opportunity to debate the issue.

Estimates from the last labour force survey show that, in the summer of 1995, there were 330,000 unemployed people of working age in Great Britain who said they had a health problem or a disability expected to last for more than one year. The survey does not currently enable us to estimate the number of disabled people, as defined in the Disability Discrimination Act, who are unemployed.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Personal Pensions

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many holders of personal pensions contribute *(a)* up to 5 per cent., *(b)* 5.1 to 10 per cent., *(c)* 10.1 to 15 per cent. and *(d)* more than 15 per cent. of their earnings; and, of each of the above categories, how many receive employer's contributions of (i) up to 5 per cent., (ii) 5.1 to 10 per cent., (iii) 10.1 to 15 per cent. and (iv) above 15 per cent. of earnings.

Mr. Heald: Provisional Inland Revenue estimates of the amounts of contributions to personal pensions for 1994–95, are £2,110 million of employees' contributions and £590 million of employers' contributions.

There are no statistically reliable sources of information on the proportion of earnings contributed to personal pensions.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he intends to publish the report of the Social Security Advisory Committee on his proposals to restrict the entitlement of asylum seekers to benefit. [8979]

Mr. Roger Evans: The report of the Social Security Advisory Committee was laid before Parliament on Thursday 11 January and was published today in a Command Paper.

Pensioners (Benefits)

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish for each year since 1979 *(a)* each means-tested benefit applicable to pensioners in that year, *(b)* the number of claimants of each benefit and *(c)* their figure as a percentage of the total number of pensioners. [9533]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the tables.

Recipients of means-tested benefits by type of benefit

1979–1994

Year	*Supplementary Benefit/Income Support*	*As a per cent. of the population aged 60 and over*	*Family Income Supplement/Family Credit*	*As a per cent. of the population aged 60 and over*	*Housing Benefit*
1979	1,723,000	15.9	n/a	n/a	n/a
1980	1,694,000	15.4	n/a	n/a	n/a
1981	1,738,000	15.6	n/a	n/a	n/a
1982	1,781,000	15.8	n/a	n/a	n/a
1983	1,651,000	14.6	n/a	n/a	n/a
1984	1,683,000	14.7	n/a	n/a	n/a
1985	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1986	1,717,000	14.9	n/a	n/a	n/a
1987	1,727,000	15.0	n/a	n/a	n/a
1988	1,719,000	14.9	n/a	n/a	n/a
1989	1,607,000	13.8	1,000	–	2,100,000
1990	1,675,000	14.4	1,000	–	2,067,000
1991	1,575,000	13.5	1,000	–	1,957,000
1992	1,643,000	14.0	1,000	–	1,957,000
1993	1,736,000	14.8	1,000	–	1,980,000
1994	1,765,000	15.1	2,000	–	1,944,000

Year	*As a per cent. of the population aged 60 and over*	*Council Tax Benefit*	*As a per cent. of the population aged 60 and over*	*Community Charge Benefit*	*As a per cent. of the population aged 60 and over*
1979	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1980	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1981	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Year	As a per cent. of the population aged 60 and over	Council Tax Benefit	As a per cent. of the population aged 60 and over	Community Charge Benefit	As a per cent. of the population aged 60 and over
1982	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1983	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1984	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1985	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1986	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1987	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1988	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1989	18.1	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1990	17.8	n/a	n/a	3,644,000	31.4
1991	16.7	n/a	n/a	3,202,000	27.4
1992	16.7	n/a	n/a	3,057,000	26.1
1993	16.9	2,820,000	24.0	n/a	n/a
1994	16.6	2,799,000	23.9	n/a	n/a

Notes:
1. Numbers are rounded to the nearest thousand, percentages to one decimal place.
2. A pensioner has been defined as aged 60 and over.
3. Community Charge Benefit (CCB) replaced Rent Rebate in Scotland from April 1989 and the rest of Great Britain from April 1990. Figures for Community Charge Benefit in Scotland as at May 1989 are not available. Community Charge Benefit was replaced by Council Tax Benefit (CTB) from April 1993.
4. The total number of pensioners receiving Housing Benefit or Family Income Supplement is not available prior to 1989.
5. Income Support replaced Supplementary Benefit in April 1988.
6. Family Credit replaced Family Income Supplement in April 1988.
7. Sample Sizes: Income Support and Family Credit 5 per cent. Disability Working Allowance 100 per cent. count of all claims. Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit/Community Charge Benefit 1 per cent.
8. No figures are available for 1985 for Income Support due to industrial action.

Source:
Social Security Statistics 1979–1995.
1 per cent. Sample of recipients of Housing benefit/council tax benefit.
Family credit 5 per cent. Sample of awards.
Disability Working Allowance 100 per cent. Count of awards.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what costs his Department and executive agencies have incurred as a result of withdrawing from contracts under which mobile phones are provided; and if he will list the companies concerned. [9769]

Mr. Burt: None.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what agreements his Department and its executive agencies have with companies for the provision of mobile and car phones; and if he will list the companies having these contracts, the duration of the contracts, the number of phones covered by each agreement and the cost to public funds of each agreement; [9767]

(2) what procedures were used by his Department in awarding contracts for the supply of mobile and car phones to his Department and its executive agencies; and which companies were involved in tendering for these contracts. [9768]

Mr. Burt: The Department does not currently have any agreements for the provision of mobile telephones. Each request for the supply of a mobile telephone is dealt with individually and following established public sector procurement procedures, the order is placed with the supplier that offers the most economically advantageous terms.

The information relating to the provision of mobile telephones that is readily available is shown in the table. Information for earlier years could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Period	Total numbers of mobile phones supplied	Suppliers
April 1994 to 31 November 1995	3,013	Benfells Car Phones ACR Ltd. Car Radios Station Ltd. Cellphones RGS Cellphones ROCOM Ltd. Excell Direct G-Comm Ltd. Hutchison Telecom Martin Dawes Telecommunication Peoples Phone Company plc R.T. Systems Ltd. Sitelink Comms Vodac Government plc

Pensioners (Incomes)

Mr. Benton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost in 1996–97 of paying a basic pension supplement to all pensioner units whose total pension income from all sources is less than the level of income support to raise their pension incomes to the income support level; and what would be the annual cost of maintaining pensioners' pension incomes at that level in real terms for each year until 2001–02, assuming the 1996–97 income support regime and giving costs net of any effects on tax and benefit revenues. [6706]

Mr. Heald: The estimated cost in 1996–97 of raising the total pension income from all sources of all pensioner units to at least the level of income support is £2.15 billion. It is not possible to give estimates of this

cost to the year 2001–02 as reliable forecasts of future levels of pensioners' incomes are not available for this period.

Notes:

1. It has been assumed that the pensioner supplement would be paid as an increase in income support levels. Maintaining the current income-related benefit system involves aligning the thresholds and income for assessment purposes in the other income-related benefits. As a result, there are increased costs in the housing benefit and council tax benefit included in the total.

2. To raise pension-only income to the levels specified implies that other income would be disregarded. The costs reflect this assumption also.

3. No account has been taken of any additional costs that would arise from the abolition of the existing capital limits in the income-related benefits which would be necessary to ensure that those above these limits also received any required increase in pension income.

4. As income support is not taxable for claimants over 60 years of age, there will be no net tax effects from the increased payments in income support.

5. The costs have been estimated using data drawn from the May 1994 Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry and the 1991, 1992 and 1993 Family Expenditure Surveys, uprated to 1996–97 prices and benefits levels and rounded to £50 million.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 12 December, *Official Report*, column *623*, how the throughput of incapacity benefit claims has been controlled; in what respects the cases processed so far are unrepresentative; what effect this is likely to have had on the proportion of successful claims; and when he expects to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the benefit in meeting its objectives. [7926]

Mr. Burt: The rate at which pre-April invalidity benefit cases are being scheduled for the all work test is being carefully controlled to ensure that the total work available, including new claims, does not exceed operational capacity. This gradual introduction of pre-April claims into the system means that the greater proportion of cases being processed are new claims which is unrepresentative of the case load as a whole. As it is not possible to estimate accurately the effect that this might have on the proportion of successful claims, it would be unwise to draw any firm conclusions about the effectiveness of the new procedures during this transitional period.

Detailed arrangements for the monitoring and evaluation of the changes are in place. It is too early to predict when definitive conclusions might be drawn.

Housing and Council Tax Benefits

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the effect on revenues in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98 of extending the proposal to give additional help with housing benefit and council tax benefit during the first four weeks of work for unemployed people returning to work, to include a continued entitlement to income support during that time. [8502]

Mr. Roger Evans: The cost of extending this proposal to include a continued entitlement to income support—and income-related jobseeker's allowance, where appropriate—on the same basis, is estimated to be £150 million in 1996–97 and £170 million in 1997–98. This does not include any behavioural effects such as more people returning to work.

Pensioners (Benefit Take-up)

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total amount of income-related benefits, in constant prices, that has not been taken up by pensioners in each year since 1990; and what was the average amount of income-related benefits, in constant prices, not taken up per eligible pensioner in each year since 1990. [9050]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

Table 1: Total amount of Housing Benefit and Income Support not taken up by pensioners

£ million

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993–94*
Estimated money value	(400:630)	(370:720)	(600:910)	(600:890)
Constant 1993–94 prices	(460:720)	(400:770)	(620:940)	(600:890)

Table 2: Average weekly amount of Housing Benefit and Income Support not taken up

Pensioners	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993–94*
Housing Benefit				
Estimated money value	£11.45	£13.90	£16.60	£17.95
Constant 1993–94 prices	£13.05	£14.90	£17.10	£17.95
Income Support				
Estimated money value	£8.85	£13.45	£13.05	£14.10
Constant 1993–94 prices	£10.05	£14.40	£13.45	£14.10

1. The constant price figures given above have been deflated using the GDP deflator.
2. The figures quoted below exclude full-time self-employed cases and those not living in private households.
3. Pensioner benefit units are defined as: a single person aged 60 years or over, or a couple one of whom is aged 60 years or over.
4. The most recent information is for 1993–94.
5. The figures in table 1 are presented as ranges within which it can be assumed that the true amount of benefit not taken up will lie.

Pensions (Uprating)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will base the calculation of the state retirement pension and public service pension on the formula of the higher of average *(a)* earnings or *(b)* prices; and if he will make a statement; [9106]

(2) to what extent the use of the data derived from the September retail prices index are now estimated by his Department to be pertinent in respect of the uprating of *(a)* state and *(b)* public service pensions following the Budget statement; what alternative arrangements he is considering; and if he will make a statement; [9109]

(3) if he will base the calculation of pension increases on the average earnings index; and if he will make a statement. [9105]

Mr. Heald: We have no plans to change the existing arrangements for the uprating of either state retirement pension or public service pensions.

Cold Weather Payments

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many eligible pensioners have not received cold weather payments due to not claiming pensioner or disability premiums with income support, in each year since the introduction of cold weather payments; and what is the total amount of money that would have been paid to such pensioners for cold weather payments, in constant prices, if they had claimed the income support pensioner or disability premiums for which they are entitled; [9048]

(2) what research his Department has carried out into the monthly death rates faced by pensioners not claiming pensioner or disability premiums with income support and cold weather payments despite being eligible; and what plans he has to investigate whether such pensioners face disproportionate death rates during the winter months. [9049]

Mr. Roger Evans: Pensioner and disability premiums are not a separate benefit, but form part of the calculation of income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit and are awarded automatically when the conditions are satisfied. Similarly, cold weather payments are awarded automatically when eligibility conditions are met.

Housing Benefit (Walthamstow)

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of households in Walthamstow in receipt of housing benefit. [8980]

Mr. Roger Evans: Information is not available in the format requested.

At 31 May 1995, there were 24,100[1] recipients of housing benefit in the London borough of Waltham Forest[2].

Notes:

[1] The number of recipients relates to benefit units which may be a single person or couple.

[2] Walthamstow is part of the London borough of Waltham Forest.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what assessment he has made of the benefits of privatising the Recruitment and Assessment Services, agency. [8328]

Mr. Willetts: Privatisation offers the best way to develop the potential of RAS. Freed from public sector constraints, it will be able to compete for business in wider markets, both public and private, offer new opportunities for investment and allow for the introduction of more flexible use of staff resources. Customer departments will benefit from the opportunities for improving performance that privatisation will bring. In reaching these conclusions, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster received advice from financial advisers and customer departments.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if his Department will retain ownership of the tests carried out by the Recruitment and Assessment Services agency if it is privatised; and if he will make a statement. [8436]

Mr. Willetts: The Government will retain ownership of the tests.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if all the functions of the Recruitment and Assessment Services agency are to be sold on its privatisation; and if he will make a statement. [8493]

Mr. Willetts: Yes. The services provided by the agency will transfer to the private sector.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what will be the length of the term of contract to the successful bidder of the Recruitment and Assessment Services agency if it is privatised; and if he will make a statement. [8434]

Mr. Willetts: This will be decided during the sale process in the light of customers' views and advice from financial and legal advisers.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what value he has set on the skill of Recruitment and Assessment Services agency staff for the purposes of privatisation; and if he will make a statement. [8475]

Mr. Willetts: The skills of RAS staff are vital to its business. The valuation placed on the business will recognise this.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if the staff of the Recruitment and Assessment Services agency were consulted in advance prior to the announcement of its privatisation; and if he will make a statement. [8435]

Mr. Willetts: No. The decision to privatise the Recruitment and Assessment Services agency reflected the view reached by Ministers that privatisation was the best way to secure the long-term interests of the staff and customers, as well as those of the taxpayer.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what factors led him to set the time scale for privatising the Recruitment and Assessment Services agency; and if he will make a statement. [8527]

Mr. Willetts: To keep the period of uncertainty for RAS staff and customers to a minimum.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what public consultation process has been arranged in respect of privatising the Recruitment and Assessment Services agency; and if he will make a statement; [8327]

(2) what length of notice customers' organisations of the Recruitment and Assessment Services agency were given regarding its intended privatisation; and if he will make a statement. [8437]

Mr. Willetts: Major customers were consulted before the decision to privatise. The consultation provided adequate time for them to express views. There will be continuing close consultation with customers during the privatisation process. The principle of selection on merit by fair and open competition, to which the Government are committed, is not affected by the proposed privatisation.

Royal Family (Publicity Service Costs)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects to publish the 1994–95 costs to the Central Office of Information for publicity services to the royal family. [8904]

Mr. Willetts: The COI is responsible for organising television, radio and newspaper attendance at visits by senior members of the royal family while carrying out their official duties outside London. Some 419 venues were visited in 1994–95. The COI provides appropriate briefing material for such visits and also provides a media summary service for the Queen when on official engagements overseas.

The cost of these services in 1994–95 was £354,051. These costs normally appear in the royal finance booklet. The 1994–95 costs were not available for the most recent edition of the booklet.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 18 January 1996

ENVIRONMENT

Homelessness

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of *(a)* the number of hostel places available for the homeless in London, *(b)* the number of unused hostel places in London, *(c)* the number of empty council houses in (i) central London and (ii) the old LCC area and *(d)* the estimated number of rough sleepers in London. [8876]

Mr. Clappison: The information requested on hostel places for the homeless is not held centrally.

The 1995 housing investment programme returns from London borough in the former LCC area show a total of 13,879 vacant local authority dwellings on 1 April 1995, the latest date for which figures are available. Of these, 6,049 were management vacants—that is, dwellings available for letting immediately or after minor repairs. A report containing the figures for individual borough—"1995 HIP1 All Items Print"—will be placed in the Library shortly.

Information about the extent of rough sleeping is mostly anecdotal or estimated, except for central London where voluntary sector agencies carry out a twice-yearly count of rough sleepers. The methodology for this arose from an independent evaluation of the rough sleepers initiative, commissioned by my Department. The most recent count, in November 1995, found 272 people sleeping rough in central London.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the total numbers of homeless individuals in *(a)* England, *(b)* Greater London, *(c)* outer London and *(d)* inner London in each year since 1991. [8914]

Mr. Clappison: The number of households for which local authorities accepted responsibility to secure accommodation, under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 Housing Act, were as follows in the years 1991 to 1995:

Year	*England*	*Greater London*	*Inner London*[1]	*Outer London*
1991	144,780	37,060	21,950	15,110
1992	142,890	37,840	22,630	15,210
1993	132 380	31,890	17,550	14,340
1994	122,660	28,810	16,330	12,480

Note:
[1] Covering City of London, Camden, Hackney, Hammersmith and Fulham, Haringy, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Lambeth, Lewisham, Newham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Wandsworth and Westminster.
Source:
P I E Quarterly returns.

Contaminated Land (Easington)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on contaminated land in the district of Easington; and if he will list the locations of contaminated sites. [9578]

Mr. Clappison: The Government set out their policy on contaminated land in England in the document "Framework for Contaminated Land", published in November 1994. The document proposed a modern contaminated land power, which has been provided in section 57 of the Environment Act 1995. This will apply to any contaminated land in Easington in the same way as elsewhere.

The Department of the Environment does not keep records on individual contaminated sites.

Noise Pollution

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has had on the problems of *(a)* noise pollution and *(b)* noisy neighbours. [7850]

Mr. Clappison: My Department continues to receive representations about all forms of environmental noise on a regular basis. The vast majority of representations relate to neighbour noise issues.

Following the review of neighbour noise controls, a package of measures is being taken forward aimed at strengthening the controls over excessive noise from domestic premises and improving local authority noise services and liaison with the police through guidance and dissemination of best practice.

The hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) is taking forward a private Member's Bill which will introduce clearer powers for temporary confiscation of noise making equipment and a new criminal offence to deal with excessive noise at night from domestic premises.

GLC Heritage Collection

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which body is now responsible for the safekeeping of the Greater London council heritage collection inventory. [8763]

Sire Paul Beresford: The inventory of the GLC's heritage collection has been held at the Greater London record office since 1 April 1986.

Gulf War (Pollution)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the environmental damage caused by the deliberate release of oil into the Gulf between Khafji and the island of Abu Ai during the Gulf war; how many bird mortalities resulted from the pollution; and if the final ecological assessment of damage in the Gulf has now been made. [9085]

Mr. Clappison: A report by the United Nations environment programme on the environmental effects of the Gulf war was presented to the UNEP Governing Council in May 1993—UNEP GC.7 Inf.9. The report included an assessment of the impact of oil released into

the Gulf during the conflict, including an assessment of bird mortalities. More than 30,000 birds are believed to have died during the conflict. A copy of the report is in the Library of the House. Further studies into possible long-term effects are largely a matter for the states in the region.

Habitat II Conference

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the United Kingdom's involvement in the Habitat II conference on sustainable communities; what are the implications of Habitat II for his Department's planning and housing policies; and if he will make a statement on his future objectives for Habitat II. [9951]

Mr. Gummer: The United Kingdom is taking an active part in the preparations for the United Nations conference on human settlements. We, together with our EU partners, are contributing to the drafting of the "Habitat Agenda" which is to be the major output of the conference.

My Department is co-ordinating the preparation of the UK's national report for the conference. We are also working closely with a wide range of organisations—local government, non-governmental and professional—through the UK National Council for Habitat II.

In respect of the future objectives for Habitat II, my Department will promote internationally UK ideas, policies and best practice and use the conference to raise international and national awareness of the means to achieve sustainable development.

We will need to await the outcome of Habitat II before determining the implications for my Department's planning and housing policies.

Erewash Borough Council

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has yet considered the responses by Erewash borough council to the notice served on it on 7 September 1995 under section 13 of the Local Government Act 1988; and if he will make a statement. [10411]

Sir Paul Beresford: My right hon. Friend has considered carefully the responses which Erewash borough council has made to the notice served on the authority on 7 September 1995, and has today given the authority a direction under section 14 of the Local Government Act 1988.

After careful consideration, the Secretary of State remains of the opinion that the authority acted in an anti-competitive manner in awarding a contract to its in-house direct labour organisation in favour of a bid which was £70,000 cheaper, because it did not have well founded reasons for doing so. He feels that, in assigning the contract of £326,150 to its DSO, the authority did not show that it had carried out an adequate assessment of the private contractor's abilities.

The direction given to Erewash borough council requires the authority to retender the contract for a ground maintenance contract, which was the subject of the notice, so that new arrangements are in place by 1 January 1997, and to seek my right hon. Friend's consent should it wish to reassign the work in-house.

Leaseholders

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he plans to take to strengthen the rights of owners of leasehold flats. [10859]

Mr. Gummer: I have received a large number of representations from right hon. and hon. Members and leaseholders, particularly in London, about allegations that some landlords have been behaving unreasonably. The allegations are that a number of landlords have been buying up freeholds of blocks of flats and then presenting the leaseholders with very large maintenance and service charge bills. The amounts demanded appear to be excessive in relation to the work required, and the landlords can make a substantial profit by employing associated surveyors, contractors and managing agents, and earning commission. Any leaseholders who challenge the service charges are met with aggression and intimidation from the landlord and threatened with forfeiture of the lease.

There is already a considerable body of legislation offering safeguards to leaseholders. After careful consideration of these recent developments, however, I have decided that further action should now be taken to strengthen leaseholders' rights.

I therefore propose the following legislative amendments. First, I propose a number of changes to the right of first refusal contained in part I of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987 to help ensure that tenants are given the opportunity to exercise this right if their landlord wishes to dispose of his interest. Secondly, I shall amend the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993, so that qualifying leaseholders will have a right to enfranchise where their block of flats has more than one freehold interest. Thirdly, I intend to give a recognised residents' association a right to challenge major works proposed by its landlord before the work has commenced. Fourthly, I shall amend the law of forfeiture so that forfeiture proceedings are separated from disputes over service charges. Fifthly, I shall strengthen the grounds available to leaseholders seeking to require the court to appoint a manager of their block of flats where the landlord is failing to carry out his obligations in a reasonable manner.

Finally, I am concerned about the cost which leaseholders can face in pursuing their rights through the courts and I am considering the possibility of transferring disputes over service charges to leasehold valuation tribunals.

I will bring forward amendments to the Housing Bill, which is being introduced today, to give effect to these proposals.

I have today placed a note in the Library of the House which outlines these proposals in more detail.

Home Safety

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what plans he has to provide specific funding for local authorities to provide home safety initiatives; [9682]

(2) what plans he has to make the provision of home safety initiatives a mandatory function of local authorities; and if he will make a statement. [9683]

Mr. Maclean: I have been asked to reply.

None. Local authorities all over the country are already engaged in productive crime prevention/community safety initiatives with the police, local businesses and the voluntary sector. This has been achieved without central funding and without the burden of a new statutory responsibility. I see no need to change arrangements which have worked so well.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what analysis he has made of the consequences in Scotland of the changes to the budget of the home energy efficiency scheme; and if he will make a statement. [9382]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have been asked to reply. There will be no impact on low-income households in Scotland. The reduction in the budget will be met by requiring better-off householders who qualify for HEES grants because of their age to make a contribution of 75 per cent. towards the cost of the work.

TRANSPORT

Marine Safety Agency

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the adequacy of staffing levels within the Marine Safety Agency to cope with a marine accident on the scale of the Estonia accident. [8231]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. Graham Allen, dated 18 January 1996:

I am responding to your question to the Secretary of State for Transport asking what assessment has been made of the adequacy of staffing levels within the Marine Safety Agency (MSA) to cope with a marine accident on the scale of the ESTONIA accident.

The MSA is currently operating to a complement of some 175 professional and 190 administrative staff. Approximately half of these are based in our Southampton HQ, and the remainder are spread throughout the UK. I am satisfied that staffing levels are sufficient to undertake the tasks agreed in our Business and Corporate Plans. If another incident of the magnitude of the ESTONIA were to occur, then priorities would be reassessed.

Executive Agencies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if answers sent to hon. Members in reply to parliamentary questions by the head of executive agencies in his Department are *(a)* seen, *(b)* approved and *(c)* amended by him before they are sent; and if he will identify any letters to which amendments by him have been made in 1994–95. [7827]

Sir George Young: When my Department's agency chief executives are invited by Ministers to write to hon. Members to provide information sought in parliamentary questions, their replies are subject to ministerial approval. Letters that were amended in draft by Ministers could be identified only at disproportionate cost.

Port of Fishguard

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will discuss with the Rail Franchising Director the introduction of a minimum passenger service requirement covering the port of Fishguard; and if he will make a statement. [8970]

Mr. Watts: No. The detailed specification of passenger service requirements is a matter for the Franchising Director. Services to Fishguard will be covered by the PSR for the South Wales and West Railway on which the Franchising Director will be consulting in due course. The new franchisee for Great Western train services—Great Western Holdings—has specifically committed to maintain the overall number of services in the 1995–96 timetable between London Paddington and Fishguard, until the timetable for 1999–2000 and subject to connecting ferry services continuing to operate during that period.

Rail Fares

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from the Consumers Association regarding the quotation of rail ticket prices; what assessment he has made; if he will make it his policy to require rail staff to quote the lowest possible fare available; and if he will make a statement. [8732]

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been sent a copy of the *Which?* survey into British Rail's ticketing and information services.

The survey is based on a small and selective sample of routes and does not provide a representative picture of BR's performance. Nevertheless, passengers have a right to expect accurate travel information and it has been recognised for some time that the present arrangements need improvement. A national train information system is being developed for the new railway, and rail privatisation, by introducing sector energy and know-how, should help address the shortcomings of the current systems.

Operators are already required to provided impartial and comprehensive information about rail fares.

MV Derbyshire

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations he has had with the MV Derbyshire family association regarding the proposed inquiry into the loss of the MV Derbyshire; and if he will make a statement. [9582]

Mr. Norris: We are currently consulting the Derbyshire family association on the arrangements for the return expedition to the wreck of the Derbyshire. We will take account of its views in defining the objectives and priorities of the expedition to ensure that this final re-examination is meticulously planned in the hope that we can gather as much information as possible about the cause of the loss, with resulting benefits to ship safety.

Rail Services (Adverse Weather)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will instruct Railtrack to seek advice from

Austrian Railways on maintaining services in adverse weather conditions. [9826]

Mr. Watts: No. Railtrack maintains the infrastructure for which it is responsible in accordance with its contractual obligations to train operators and to rigorous safety standards which are overseen by the Health and Safety Executive.

Road Tax Evasion

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to reduce road tax evasion. [9894]

Mr. Norris: A number of initiatives are planned. A scheme to wheel clamp vehicles for excise duty offences will be introduced in London shortly. Measures to improve the quality of the national vehicle record to make it more difficult for motorists to drop out of the licensing system are being developed. Use of camera technology to automate the detection of offence is also being taken forward.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve the procedures for road tax evasion reporting by police and traffic wardens. [9895]

Mr. Norris: The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency receives more than 1.5 million excise offence reports annually for enforcement action from the police and traffic wardens and other sources.

The recent study by the National Audit Office on vehicle excise duty on evasion and enforcement reported that some offence reports received were of poor quality and could not be successfully pursued. The exact number of these is unclear since precise figures are not available and other categories of cases not pursued are included in the calculation. If further work identifies this as an area of concern, it will be taken up with those who provide the agency with offence reports.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to support the confiscation of unregistered and unlicensed HGVs. [9830]

Mr. Norris: Powers to wheel clamp and impound all types of unlicensed vehicles parked on the public road will be introduced shortly. A pilot wheel clamping scheme starting in London in February will enable us to assess the effectiveness of these powers in combating vehicle excise duty evasion.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to strengthen the enforcement of the maximum driving hours laws on foreign HGV drivers. [9831]

Mr. Norris: The European directive which lays down minimum targets for drivers' hours checks requires that roadside checks must be carried out without discriminating as to nationality. The UK exceeds the requirements for checks on drivers' hours. Funding for investigative work on all aspects of enforcement was increased this financial year by £350,000 and a significant proportion of this additional funding will be spent on drivers' hours checking and enforcement.

Road Markings (Schools)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to make it a statutory offence to park within the road markings outside school gates. [9829]

Mr. Norris: We have no plans to change the existing legislation, which provides for markings outside school entrances to be either advisory or enforceable. It is the responsibility of individual traffic authorities to decide what is appropriate in the light of local circumstances.

Freight Facilities Grants

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what sums have been invested by the Government under the Railways Act section 36 freight facilities grants system since 1993; and if he will make a statement. [9897]

Mr. Watts: The sum of £415,000 in November 1993 to the Huntsman Chemical Company Ltd. These environmental grants are awarded under section 140 of the Railways Act 1993 to help defray the capital costs of inland waterway freight facilities. In this instance, grant will enable the company to carry styrene monomer by water from Baglan bay, south Wales to its processing plant at Carrington near Manchester for the next 10 years, thereby removing some 6,000 lorry journeys a year from the roads.

Driving Tests

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how long on average those waiting to take a driving test have to wait in Portsmouth. [9919]

Mr. Norris: Waiting times at Portsmouth are currently six weeks for car tests and two weeks for motorcycle tests—both well within our service standards.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assurances were offered by Her Majesty's Government in respect of the funding of the channel tunnel. [10115]

Mr. Watts: I am not aware that any assurances have been offered by the UK Government. From the start it was always envisaged that the channel tunnel would be an entirely private sector project, and that the concessionaires would have no recourse to Government funds or guarantees of a financial or commercial nature. That remains the position.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from Eurotunnel in respect of the refinancing of the channel tunnel; and if he will make a statement. [10113]

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend has received representations from Eurotunnel on a number of issues, including the company's current financial difficulties. It has been made clear to the company that any financial restructuring of Eurotunnel is a matter for the company to resolve in discussion with its bankers, and without Government intervention.

Road Network (Management and Maintenance)

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how he intends to proceed with the Highways Agency proposals for new agency arrangements for the management and maintenance of the motorway and trunk road network which were the subject of consultation last year. [10663]

Mr. Watts: We intend to proceed on the lines proposed in the consultation. In general, we aim to establish new agencies whose size and coverage will be based on considerations of effective management and to enlarge competition by involving the public and private sectors with both tendering against a single common agreement. We are re-examining the proposed areas and timing of implementation in the light of the decision to increase the number of design, build, finance and operate schemes announced on 29 November. We have already announced our decision on the way forward in London. It was stated in the consultation document that we would continue putting in place new agency agreements for April 1996 where current agents were ceasing to exist, as in Avon and Humberside, or current private sector agencies were due for retendering, such as the term contracts in south and west London and consultancies for the midland links and Greater Manchester agencies. These are all proceeding to plan.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Mobile Phones

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many mobile telephones have been supplied to his Department in each of the last eight years; and in each year how many different suppliers were involved. [9127]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Headquarters—and associated officers—currently have 61 live contracts for mobile telephones with British Telecom, Cellcom and Talkland.

The telephones were supplied in each of the following years as follows:

	Supplier	*Number*
April 1990 to April 1991	British Telecom	3
	Cellcom	5
April 1991 to April 1992	Cellcom	3
April 1992 to April 1993	British Telecom	6
	Cellcom	9
April 1993 to April 1994	Talkland	11
	British Telecom	4
April 1994 to April 1995	Talkland	1
	Cellcom	1
Since April 1995	Talkland	10
	Carphone Warehouse	8
	Dictating Machine Co. Ltd	8

Information prior to 1990 is unavailable.

I have asked the chief executives of the Court Service and the Public Trust Office to reply separately.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. William Ross, dated 18 January 1996:

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to the above Question about the number of mobile telephones supplied to the Court Service and the number of suppliers used.

Not all Circuit offices keep central figures of the mobile telephones in use in their region and a number are supplied under local arrangements. To obtain more detailed information in the timescale allowed would incur a disproportionate cost. Nevertheless, I can confirm that in April 1995, the date on which the Court Service was established, approximately 411 mobile phones were in use throughout the Court Service. This figure now stands at approximately 502. Some 22 suppliers are involved.

Letter from Julia C. Lomas to Mr. William Ross, dated 18 January 1996:

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply to your as part of the Lord Chancellor's Department's response to your Parliamentary Question, listed on 10 January 1996, regarding the number of mobile phones purchased in each of the last eight years and the number of different suppliers involved.

The Public Trust Office has not supplied any mobile phones to its staff during the last eight years.

Land Transfers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make it his policy to extend section 123 of the Land Registration Act 1925 to conveyances which do not accompany a transfer of the beneficial interest in the land; and if he will make a statement. [9107]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: A joint working group comprising representatives of the Law Commission, Land Registry and Lord Chancellor's Department has recommended that section 123 of the Land Registration Act 1925 should be extended to cover assents, vesting deeds, conveyances by way of gift, conveyances pursuant to a court order and first legal mortgages, and that there should be a power to extend to other dispositions after appropriate consultation. That recommendation, together with others in the working groups's report, published as Law Com. 235, has been accepted by the Government and legislation to give effect to the recommendations will be introduced as soon as there is a suitable opportunity.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what action heads of his Department's executive agencies are taking to safeguard the provision of pre-retirement courses in the event of such agencies seeking to make economies; and if he will make a statement. [9143]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Lord Chancellor has responsibility for four agencies: The Court Service, HM Land Registry, The Public Record Office and The Public Trust Office. As the question concerns a specific operational matter, the chief executives of the Land Registry, the Public Record Office and the Public Trust Office have been asked to reply direct. This answer is, however, given on behalf of the Court Service as the Lord Chancellor's Department welfare service provides pre-retirement courses for the Court Service. Courses are provided to meet demand and there are no plans to discontinue this practice.

Letter from Julia C. Lomas to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 18 January 1996:

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to respond to you as part of the Lord Chancellor's Department's response to your Parliamentary Question, listed on 10 January 1996, regarding the action each Agency is taking to safeguard the provision of pre-retirement courses in the event of such Agencies seeking to make economies.

The Public Trust Office does not run in-house pre-retirement courses due to the relatively small number of staff retiring each year. We do, however, offer external courses to such staff and there are no plans to discontinue this practice.

Letter from Sarah Tyacke to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 18 January 1996:

I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply for the Public Record Office to your question about the safeguarding of the provision of pre-retirement courses in the executive agencies for which he is responsible.

Although the Public Record Office is making economies, it has safeguarded its provision of pre-retirement courses by maintaining the resources devoted to them at existing levels, and it plans to continue to do so.

Letter from John Manthorpe to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 18 January 1996:

I have been asked by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, to reply to your recent question concerning the provision of pre-retirement courses. It has long been the practice within HM Land Registry to offer all staff approaching retirement age the opportunity of attending a pre-retirement course and there are no plans to restrict this facility. These courses may be run either in-house on a regional basis or by the purchase of places on courses run by other departments or organisations.

I do hope that this answers the point raised with the Parliamentary Secretary but please contact me if I can be of any further assistance.

TREASURY

Tax (Self-assessment)

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information and advice has been given to persons likely to be affected by self-assessment; and what is expected to be given before the tax forms are sent out. [8315]

Mr. Jack: A substantial programme of publicity and education for those taxpayers who will be affected by self-assessment is under way. A major publicity programme aimed directly at the 9 million who get tax returns, using TV and national press, was launched in June 1995 with a second phase in the autumn. Further phases are planned until well after self-assessment has been introduced.

The Inland Revenue recognises that self-assessment will also affect agents and employers. A major initiative has been undertaken to provide them with the information they need. Information packs were sent to 85,000 agents and 1.15 million employers last summer, which have included invitations to seminars provided by local tax offices. Over 50,000 people have attended seminars so far. Further mailshots and seminars are planned for this three-year education programme.

An insert on self-assessment will accompany the tax return that people receive in April 1996—the last of the old-style forms. This will explain what the new system will mean for them and what steps they should take to prepare for it.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates of compliance costs for employers have been made concerning tax self-assessment in each of the last three years. [8316]

Mr. Jack: A single compliance cost assessment has been made to cover the overall impact of self-assessment, on employers and others, for example, the self-employed. This was published on 28 November 1994 and a copy is available in the House Library. It shows that there will be recurrent costs for employers who provide benefits to their employees—currently about a third of all employers—estimated at £20 to £30 million a year. This extra work has been kept to a minimum following extensive consultation. Those employers who are self-employed will find this to be at least partially offset by the net recurrent savings to self-employed people. The net savings to business after taking account of these and other costs are estimated at between £125 and £250 million a year.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what response he has made to representations from the Institute of Taxation in respect of the impact of tax self-assessment; and when he responded to the institute. [8318]

Mr. Jack: Representatives of the Chartered Institute of Taxation sit on, and play a full part in, the Self Assessment Consultative Committee. This was set up as a forum for the Inland Revenue to meet representatives of business and the professions to discuss issues relevant to self assessment. Reports are made to Ministers on major issues arising from such discussions, and Treasury Ministers have met the committee on a number of occasions.

The CIOT submitted its budget representations on 29 June 1995, and aspects of these, including self-assessment, were discussed at a meeting with the Deputy Chairman of the Inland Revenue on 7 July. Further meetings both by Ministers and the Inland Revenue have since been held at which CIOT representations on self-assessment have been discussed.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the latest estimate of the overall impact on business of the introduction of tax self-assessment, disaggregated into *(a)* estimated extra costs and *(b)* estimated savings. [8210]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 11 January 1996]*: Self-assessment is a major modernisation of the system of tax administration which will provide a permanent reduction for taxpayers in the costs of complying with their obligations. The changes will particularly benefit self-employed people. A compliance cost assessment detailing the estimates leading to this conclusion was published on 28 November 1994. A copy is available in the House Library.

It contains the following summary figures:

Self-assessment generates a recurrent compliance *net* saving for businesses, mainly the self-employed, of some £125 to £250 million a year.

This figure takes account of recurrent costs to employers who provide benefits to employees are estimated at £20 to £30 million a year; some but not all of these employers will benefit from compliance savings by being self-employed.

Initial costs of adapting to the new system are estimated at £100 to £200 million.

The typical small self-employed business which does not provide benefits in kind to employees could expect recurrent savings of £30 to £60 a year, more than offsetting the non-recurrent cost in a single year.

The overall annual savings are net of the costs quoted by the Opposition in the press recently.

Tax Inspectors

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many tax inspectors have been employed by the Inland Revenue in each of the last five years. [8312]

Mr. Jack: Excluding staff employed on central administration, in other supportive roles and those in certain specialist offices, the table sets out the number of tax inspectors employed at the end of each of the last five years in December, for the current year:

Inspectors

1991–92: 6,737

1992–93: 6,808

1993–94: 6,582

1994–95: 6,423

1995–96: 6,202

The number of tax inspectors deployed on investigation work has remained broadly constant.

Finance Bill

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he has taken in the drafting of the current Finance Bill to ensure its complexities do not inhibit those seeking to understand the rules for the purposes of self-assessment of tax. [8320]

Mr. Jack: Reducing complexity in the run-up to self-assessment was an important factor in deciding which measures formed part of this year's Finance Bill. Those working on the drafting of the Bill have certainly avoided where they can add to the complexity of the tax system. Indeed where possible the opportunity has been taken to simplify the rules, to make it easier for taxpayers. An example is in clause 138 on the abolition of relief for class 4 national insurance contributions.

The most effective way to help people understand their obligations under self-assessment is through the Inland Revenue's extensive education and public information campaign which is currently under way, through clear and informative guidance and leaflets, and through proper support and assistance available through tax offices and tax inquiry centres.

Labour Statistics (Peterlee and Seaham)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in the areas covered by the Peterlee and Seaham area offices are estimated to be economically inactive. [9499]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information available, from the Labour Force Survey, shows that in Durham, the county covering the Peterlee and Seaham area offices, there were 194,000 economically inactive people in summer, June to August, 1995.

Petrol and Diesel Fuel Duty

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the annual total tax collected from, and on account of, Wales by way of duty on petrol and diesel fuels; and what proportion this represents of the total such duty raised in the same year for the United Kingdom. [9310]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: It is estimated that in 1994–95 around £600 million was raised from petrol, diesel and other hydrocarbon oils duties in Wales, accounting for approximately 4 per cent. of the United Kingdom total.

Domestic Credit

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing the levels of domestic credit for each year since 1966. [9782]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Statistics covering M4 and its counterparts—including bank and building society lending—are published by the Bank of England in "Monetary Statistics"; a longer run of data is contained in the Bank of England "Statistical Abstract", part 2.

Arts

Mr. Luff: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people are employed in the arts and related cultural activities; and what changes in these figures have occurred in each year since 1993–94 in *(a)* these fields and *(b)* overall; and if she will make a statement. [9701]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Latest available information is held in table 1.4 of the January 1996 edition of "Labour Market Trends", copies of which are available in the Library.

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the rate of return in United Kingdom manufacturing industry in 1994 as a percentage of the rate on other commercial and industrial enterprises less North sea oil. [9787]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Information on rates of return by industrial and commercial companies are published in the CSO "First Release (95)136—Profitability of UK Companies". This is available from the Library of the House.

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what guidance he intends to issue to *(a)* departments, *(b)* executive agencies, *(c)* non-departmental public bodies and *(d)* outside bodies at arm's-length organisations which he has responsibility for, or an interest in, regarding the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if he will make a statement. [9222]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People on 16 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *417*.

The Departments and other bodies responsible to the Chancellor of the Exchequer will be made aware of their responsibilities under the Act.

Newarthill

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what reports the Bank of England has received from its representative in the Cayman Islands about losses suffered by local subsidiaries of the company Newarthill; what action the bank has taken in respect of these; and if he will make a statement. [7805]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 11 January 1996]:* None. The Bank of England has no representative in the Cayman Islands. Neither Newarthill plc nor any of its subsidiaries is subject to Bank of England supervision.

Delegated Legislation

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many of the powers to make statutory instruments exercisable by the Chancellor of the Exchequer under primary legislation enacted since 1979 are subject to *(a)* the negative and *(b)* the affirmative resolution procedure. [9588]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* No primary legislation enacted since 1979 has empowered the Chancellor of the Exchequer as such to make statutory instruments. Information concerning the procedure applicable to the power to make instruments given to HM Treasury, HM Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue by primary legislation enacted since 1979 is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Tiger Products

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all tiger products seized in 1995 by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise. [8909]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* HM Customs and Excise have yet to finalise their statistics for 1995. I can say, however, that in the first three quarters of the year to 30 September 1995 the following tiger products were seized as having been imported in breach of convention on international trade in endangered species requirements:

1 bottle of tiger bone pills
1 bottle of tiger bone tincture
10 packets of tiger bone pills
10 packets of tiger bone plasters
5 bottles of tiger liniment
5 sheets of musk and tiger bone plasters.

Iraqi Assets

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total sum of Iraqi assets held frozen by United Kingdom banks; and what interest has accrued since the order freezing them. [9568]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* The Bank of England advises that the value of Iraqi assets frozen in the United Kingdom was $769,000,000 as at 30 September 1995. This figure includes private as well as Iraqi Government assets. No figures are available for interest which has accrued, since banks are not required to and do not report them.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Aid Budget

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much and what percentage of official United Kingdom aid was spent on *(a)* basic needs and *(b)* direct poverty reduction between 1990 and the latest year for which figures are available. [9115]

Mr. Hanley: *(a)* The following table gives the requested breakdown of bilateral ODA programme expenditure on basic needs[1] both including and excluding bilateral emergency aid.

	Including emergency aid		*Excluding emergency aid*	
	£ million	*Share of total bilateral aid Percentage*	*£ million*	*Share of total bilateral aid[2] Percentage*
1990–91	133.9	12.8	73.8	7.5
1991–92	218.5	20.3	80.1	8.6
1992–93	230.3	20.5	87.5	8.9
1993–94	279.1	24.2	99.5	10.2
1994–95	303.3	27.1	94.4	10.4

[1] Comprises basic education, primary health care, mother/child health, family planning, nutrition, water and sanitation, and block grants to NGOs.
[2] Total bilateral aid excluding emergency aid.

Expenditure on UK aid for direct poverty reduction can be identified only for that part of ODA expenditure which is covered by the ODA policy information marker system[1] —PIMS. The following table gives a breakdown of ODA expenditure which has a direct assistance to poor people marker on the PIMS system along with emergency aid which is counted as direct assistance to poor people although it is not PIMS marked.

	Principal expenditure £ million	*Significant expenditure £ million*	*Emergency aid £ million*	*Total £ million*	*Share of total PIMS marked expenditure[2] Percentage*
1990–91	n/a	n/a	60.2	n/a	n/a
1991–92	30.3	51.1	138.5	219.9	30
1992–93	30.8	54.3	142.8	227.9	30
1993–94	51.2	39.4	179.6	270.2	33
1994–95	51.8	65.0	208.9	325.7	39

[1] Details of PIMS are available in the 1995 edition of "British Aid Statistics", a copy of which has been placed in the House of Commons Library.
[2] Including emergency aid.

Dominica

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much overseas aid has been granted by Her Majesty's Government to Dominica in each year since 1990; and how much will be awarded in 1996. [9321]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) on 16 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *507* regarding past aid disbursements to Dominica.

The aid figure for 1995–96 is not yet known. It is likely to be somewhat higher than in 1994–95 but will depend on how quickly the problem of Dominica's repayment arrears is resolved, and our capital aid programme resumed.

Aid and Trade (Biwater Group)

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the financial years since 1986 in which assistance under the aid and trade provision has been paid in respect of projects involving the Biwater group of companies. [10171]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the replies given by my hon. Friend the then Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to the hon. Member on 17 February 1994, *Official Report*, column *937* and the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) on 14 February 1994, *Official Report*, column *568*. No new ATP commitments involving Biwaters have been entered into since 1988. Expenditure on previous ATP commitments ended in 1991–92.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what guidance he intends to issue to *(a)* Departments, *(b)* executive agencies, *(c)* non-departmental public bodies and *(d)* outside bodies and arm's-length organisations which he has responsibility for, or an interest in, regarding the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if he will make a statement. [9230]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer to the answer given by the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People, on 15 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *417*. I shall ensure that my Department, and any bodies for which it is responsible, will be made aware of their responsibilities under the Act.

Champagne

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many litres of champagne were imported from France in each year since 1992. [10635]

Mr. Boswell: Imports of champagne from France, as recorded in the overseas trade statistics, are as follows:

1992: 11

1993: 14

1994: 18

1995 to September: 9.

Figures given in million litres.

The 1995 figures are provisional and may be subject to amendment.

Bovine Offals

Sir Jim Spicer: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the state veterinary service's surveillance of the handling of specified bovine offals in November and December 1995; and if he will make a statement. [10858]

Mrs. Browning: The state veterinary service, SVS, continued to make unannounced visits to slaughterhouses, hunt kennels and knackeries in November and December 1995 to monitor their handling of specified bovine offals, SBOs. The results of these visits were:

	November 1995			*December 1995*		
	Number visits	*Number unsatisfactory visits*	*Percentage unsatisfactory*	*Number visits*	*Number unsatisfactory visits*	*Percentage unsatisfactory*
Slaughterhouses	365	44	12	272	17	6
Hunt kennels and knackeries	234	38	19	193	14	7

Many of the failings found were of a comparatively mild nature, for example problems with staining SBOs or with record keeping. There were, however, some more serious cases, including incidents in which small pieces of spinal cord were left attached to carcases after dressing in slaughterhouses. Eight such instances were detected in November and two in December, the most recent on 14 December. There have been none so far in January 1996. A total of 21 instances in which spinal cord was left attached to carcases have now been detected since the SVS surveillance programme of slaughterhouses began in the summer.

The results of similar surveillance visits to rendering and incineration plants handling SBOs will be announced shortly.

I welcome these significant improvements in the handling of SBOs by slaughterhouses, hunt kennels and knackeries. I expect those that have attained a satisfactory level of performance to maintain the standards they are now achieving, and would expect that those plants which have failed to do so will work harder to ensure they do fully comply with the controls. The SVS will continue its unannounced surveillance visits to plants handling SBOs.

Intervention Beef

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he expects beef to be taken into intervention in the United Kingdom this year. [9466]

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* No beef has been taken into intervention anywhere in the EU since November 1993. I do not expect any beef to be taken in 1996.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much beef was taken into intervention in the United Kingdom in each of the last 10 years. [9465]

Mr. Hogg *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* The quantity of beef taken into intervention in the UK in each of the last 10 years was:

1986: 46,355 tonnes
1987: 44,322 tonnes
1988: 38,504 tonnes
1989: 6,967 tonnes
1990: 77,345 tonnes
1991: 95,939 tonnes
1992: 68,857 tonnes
1993: 16,650 tonnes
1994: Nil
1995: Nil.

Butterflies and Moths

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has to increase the contribution that set-aside land makes to butterfly and moth conservation. [9296]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* The management rules for set-aside land, which have been drawn up in close consultation with environmental organisations, allow farmers considerable scope to manage their land in ways which safeguard the environment and provide benefits to wildlife. We offer free conservation advice to individual farmers on the management of set-aside, including ways of improving the habitat for butterflies and moths. We are currently sponsoring two Agricultural Development Advisory Service projects in which, among other things, the populations of butterflies on set-aside land are being studied. These projects aim to demonstrate how set-aside can be managed for the benefit of plants and wildlife, including butterflies and moths.

Delegated Legislation

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many of the powers to make statutory instruments exercisable by the Minister under primary legislation enacted since 1979 are subject to *(a)* the negative and *(b)* the affirmative resolution procedure. [9596]

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* This is a matter of public record and the Ministry does not hold statistics for this information. There are, however, affirmative resolution powers in part I of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1958, in the Agriculture Act 1986 and in the Agriculture Act 1993. Negative resolution powers are contained in those Acts of Parliament and in the Animal Health Act 1981, the Animal Health and Welfare Act 1984, the Food Safety Act 1990, the Radioactive Substances Act 1993, the Water Resources Act 1991, the Fisheries Act 1981 and the Environment Act 1995, the Import of Live Fish (England and Wales) Act 1980, the Diseases of Fish Act 1983, the Fisheries Act 1981 and the Agricultural Holdings Act 1986.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what procedures were used by his Department in awarding contracts for the supply of mobile and car phones to his Department and its executive agencies; and which companies were involved in tendering for these contracts. [9738]

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* The Ministry awarded a contract for the supply of mobile and car phones to supply both the department and its executive agencies through a sealed bid competitive tender exercise.

The following companies were invited to tender for the Contract:

Motorola Ltd.
Hutchison Telecom (UK) Ltd.
Talkland International (UK) Ltd.
BT Mobile Communications
Vodac Ltd.
Mercury Communications Ltd.

Hutchison Telecom (UK) Ltd did not submit a tender.

This answer includes all of the agencies with the exception of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate, which has answered directly.

Letter from Mr. J. F. FitzGerald to Mr. Brian H. Donohoe, dated 16 January 1996:

In my Chief Executive's absence, the Minister has asked me to reply to your question about the supply of mobile and car phones to the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD). This is an operational matter for which my Chief Executive is responsible.

The VMD has very few requirements for mobile and car phones and we have, therefore, not awarded a contract for this supply. On the rare occasion that we need to hire a mobile phone we are able to use the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's call off contract or if this does not meet our specific need we make ad hoc arrangements for hire.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what agreements his Department and its executive agencies have with companies for the provision of mobile and car phones; and if he will list the companies having these contracts, the duration of the contracts, the number of phones covered by each agreement and the cost to the public funds of each agreement. [9737]

Mr. Hogg *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* At present, the Ministry and its executive agencies have one agreement in place for the provision of mobile and car telephones.

This is currently with Mercury Communications Ltd.

The duration of the agreement is three years.

Mercury has supplied 651 telephones under the current agreement.

The costs to public funds for this agreement are £310,574. These figures exclude VAT and any call charges.

This answer includes all of the agencies with the exception of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate, which has answered directly.

Letter from Mr. J. F. FitzGerald to Mr. Brian H. Donohoe, dated 16 January 1996:

In my Chief Executive's absence, the Minister has asked me to reply to your question asking for details of contracts for the supply of mobile and car phones to the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD). This is an operational matter for which my Chief Executive is responsible.

The VMD does not have any contracts with companies for the provision of mobile and car phones.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what costs his Department and executive agencies have incurred as a result of withdrawing from contracts under which mobile phones are provided; and if he will list the companies concerned. [9739]

Mr. Hogg *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* From information held centrally, no costs have been incurred in withdrawing from contracts under which mobile phones are provided.

This answer includes all of the agencies with the exception of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate, which has answered directly.

Letter from Mr. J. F. FitzGerald to Mr. Brian H. Donohoe, dated 16 January 1996:

In my Chief Executive's absence, the Minister has asked me to reply to your question about the cost of withdrawing from contracts for the supply of mobile and car phones to the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD). This is an operational matter for which my Chief Executive is responsible. The VMD has not had any contracts with companies for the provision of mobile and car phones and so has not incurred any costs as a result of withdrawing from such contracts.

Fishing Fleet

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the age and efficiency of the British fishing fleet; how he proposes to modernise it; what comparative statistics he has in respect of the figures for the *(a)* Dutch, *(b)* Spanish and (c) Danish fleets; and if he will make a statement. [8371]

Mr. Baldry: The table gives details of the ages of fishing vessels in the UK, Dutch, Spanish and Danish fleets as at the end of 1991, the latest year for which such comparative data are available.

Selected member states of the European Union fishing fleets as at 31 December 1991

		Age in years						
	Not known	*0.0–4.9*	*5.0–9.9*	*10.0–14.9*	*15.0–19.9*	*20.0–24.9*	*25.0 and over*	*Total*
Number of vessels								
United Kingdom	955	1,564	1,381	1,865	1,554	1,060	2,525	10,904
Netherlands	83	187	234	235	140	79	508	1,466
Spain	231	1,651	2,409	1,916	2,922	2,746	8,713	20,588
Denmark	180	105	303	416	686	323	1,712	3,725
GRT (000 tonnes)								
United Kingdom	4	31	18	31	45	30	52	211
Netherlands	0	60	47	22	15	4	24	173
Spain	18	113	53	53	159	102	57	656
Denmark	0	1	19	6	30	16	45	118

Source:
Eurostat FISHERIES—yearly statistics 1994.

There is no generally recognised measure of the efficiency of fishing fleets, which depends on a range of variable factors, including the skills of the fishermen involved.

The question of modernisation is primarily a matter for the commercial judgment of those in the industry. Any use of taxpayers money should concentrate on the need to reduce capacity to bring the fleet into better balance with what stocks will bear.

Fish Quotas

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what estimate he has made of fish stocks, by species, which have been discarded dead at sea because of quota restrictions for each year since the advent of the common fisheries policy; and if he will make a statement; [8363]

(2) what proposals he expects to put to his EU counterparts in the next three months for removing the need for fishermen to discard above quota fish at sea; and if he will make a statement. [8392]

Mr. Baldry: No such estimates exist within the Ministry but there is a clear need to reduce the number of discards. This will be one of the issues discussed by the fisheries conservation group which I am setting up, and I hope to be able to put proposals to the European Commission in April.

Fish Conservation

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to abolish the quota system for fisheries management and replace it with technical measures to assist conservation; and if he will make a statement. [8394]

Mr. Baldry: Quotas and technical conservation measures are both intended to protect fish stocks and to safeguard the future livelihoods of fishermen. The two approaches are complementary and I have no plans to advocate one of them to the exclusion of the other. However, I am setting up a fisheries conservation group to consider whether more can be achieved by technical conservation measures.

HEALTH

"Nursing in a Multi-ethnic NHS"

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the findings of the Policy Studies Institute report entitled, "Nursing in a Multi-ethnic NHS"; what plans he has to implement its recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [9039]

Mr. Horam: The national health service is strongly committed to equal opportunities and funds a number of innovative schemes which support the practice as well as the principle of equal opportunity.

A series of regional conferences has been organised to encourage NHS employers to share good practice and promote positive action for ethnic minority staff as a result of the findings of the Policy Studies Institute report.

The report showed that ethnic minorities are better represented within the NHS nursing and midwifery work force than in the population as a whole, but nevertheless suggested areas where improvements might be made.

Appointments (Carers and Disabled People)

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to ensure that carers are represented on the health boards and health councils which he is responsible for appointing; and if he will make a statement; [9360]

(2) what plans he has to ensure that disabled people are represented on the health boards and health councils which he is responsible for appointing; and if he will make a statement. [9362]

Mr. Malone: People representing all sections and interests of the community are encouraged, through open advertisement, to apply for non-executive appointment to national health service trusts and health authorities and to become members of community health councils. An equal opportunities policy in the selection process is adopted for all appointments.

Mrs. Daphne Banks

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give details of the circumstances in which Mrs. Daphne Banks was mistakenly pronounced dead on 5 January 1996. [9323]

Mr. Horam: This is a matter for Cambridge and Huntingdon health commission. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mrs. Margaret Scott, chairman of the commission, for details.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has commissioned into *(a)* the incidence of multiple sclerosis and *(b)* the incidence of clusters of multiple sclerosis, with particular reference to West Craven. [9692]

Mr. Bowis: The Government are funding research designed to investigate the causes of multiple sclerosis and the effectiveness of new treatments. My Department has no current proposals for research in the areas suggested. However, the main agency through which the Government supports biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council which receives its grant-in-aid from the office of my right hon. Friend, the President of the Board of Trade. The MRC is always willing to consider high quality research proposals.

GP Lists

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the procedures for the protection of the interests of (i) the patient, (ii) the general practitioner concerned and (iii) the public in cases where a general practitioner seeks to remove a patient from their NHS list. [9838]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) on 18 October 1995, *Official Report*, column *355*.

Living Wills

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to grant legal status to living wills; and if he will make a statement. [9197]

Mr. Bowis: Advance statements—living wills—are already legally binding under common law, if clearly established and applicable in the circumstances.

The Law Commission, in its report on mental incapacity, made recommendations for legislation in a number of areas including advance statements. My noble Friend the Lord Chancellor announced on 16 January that there is to be a public consultation on the proposals in due course.

We remain wholly opposed to the legalisation of euthanasia.

Child Care

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to issue guidance to social services departments on child care following the House of Lords judgment in the H (minors) (child abuse threshold conditions) case. [9930]

Mr. Bowis: The implications of the judgment are being considered, but preliminary indications are that existing guidance on good practice is not affected by the judgment.

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many incidents of carbon monoxide poisoning annually resulting in deaths and injury are *(a)* in rented property and *(b)* in owner-occupied property. [9707]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have been asked to reply.

Statistics are not available on the relative numbers of cases of carbon monoxide poisoning in rented property and in owner-occupier property. The risk of CO poisoning owing to faulty heating appliances is equally likely with any heating appliance which is not properly installed or maintained, and there are reported fatalities and injuries in the press of incidents in both types of accommodation.

PRIME MINISTER

Liverpool Dockworkers (Petition)

Mr. Parry: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the recent petition presented to 10 Downing street by Liverpool dockworkers' wives. [10250]

The Prime Minister: The abolition of the dock labour scheme has enabled United Kingdom ports to take full advantage of the commercial opportunities available to them. The Mersey Docks and Harbour Company has grasped these opportunities to make the port of Liverpool one of the most successful ports in the country. Supporting this unofficial action would serve only to threaten the growing success of the port of Liverpool.

Libya

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had since 1 December 1995 with the United States Government about making approaches to Libya, with a view to ending the imposition of sanctions. [8169]

The Prime Minister: None, although we remain in close contact with the United States on this issue. Libya knows what it has to do to secure the lifting of sanctions.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Prime Minister what is the total cost of salaries since 1992 paid to persons both in the Prime Ministers' Office and in the Cabinet Office employed on a part-time or full-time basis in any connection in relation to the Scott inquiry. [10219]

The Prime Minister: There are no officials employed on Scott inquiry related matters on a full-time or part-time basis within the Prime Minister's Office. The direct salary cost of officials within the Cabinet Office wholly employed on matters relating to the Scott inquiry from December 1992 to December 1995 is approximately £486,000. Other officials within the Prime Minister's Office and the Cabinet Office are inevitably involved from time to time; their direct salary cost is unquantifiable.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Prime Minister if he has *(a)* read or received and *(b)* authorised civil servants, Ministers or any other persons to collate or receive copies of draft sections of Sir Richard Scott's report circulated by Sir Richard Scott to Government Ministers, civil servants and other persons. [10221]

The Prime Minister: The handling of extracts of Sir Richard Scott's draft report, subject to guidance received from the inquiry, is for those to whom they are sent. The Government do not disclose details of correspondence between the inquiry and individual witnesses.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Prime Minister if *(a)* staff employed by the Cabinet Office on a part-time or full-time basis and *(b)* David Gould, during his period of employment in the civil service have read, collated or received copies of draft sections of Sir Richard Scott's report circulated to Government Ministers, civil servants and other persons. [10220]

The Prime Minister: The question of whether Cabinet Office staff should see extracts of Sir Richard Scott's draft report is at the discretion of those to whom the inquiry has sent them.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister what assurances were given by his predecessor regarding the financing of the channel tunnel; and what information he has about assurances offered by the French Government. [10116]

The Prime Minister: I am not aware that any assurances were given by my predecessor or by the French Government. From the start it was always envisaged that the channel tunnel would be an entirely private sector project, and that the concessionaires would have no recourse to Government funds or guarantees of a financial or commercial nature. That remains the position of both Governments.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Union

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he intends to publish as a Command Paper the current treaty provisions and inter-institutional agreements governing the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union. [9839]

Mr. David Davis: A Command Paper containing the current provisions of the European Community treaty and the treaty on European Union is in preparation and will be published shortly.

Inter-institutional agreements are published in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*, which is available in the House of Commons Library.

Endangered Species

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the items from endangered species seized by the Hong Kong authorities in each of the last three years. [8764]

Mr. Hanley: In the last three years, most of the seizures involved *(a)* tourists arriving in Hong Kong or residents returning from neighbouring countries bringing stuffed specimens, tonic cuisine, pets and controlled medicines; and *(b)* local shops offering for sale medicines claimed to contain rhino or tiger ingredients.

Ceremonial Dress

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give the cost of ceremonial dress for Her Majesty's representatives

abroad in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96 to date; and which countries were involved. [8767]

Mr. Hanley: Diplomatic uniform is provided to HM representatives where required by local custom and tradition.

Expenditure on diplomatic uniform in the years specified was as follows:

1993–94: £14,775
1994–95: £8,935
1995–96: £19,879 to date

The countries and dependent territories involved were Anguilla, Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands, Japan, Luxembourg, Montserrat, the Netherlands, Spain, Swaziland, Thailand and Turks and Caicos.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what items of ceremonial dress are required for Her Majesty's representative at the Holy See; and what are the itemised costs. [9176]

Mr. Hanley: Local custom requires HM representatives to the Holy See to wear full diplomatic uniform on frequent occasions.

At present, HM ambassador to the Holy See is a woman and is not required to wear uniform. Accordingly, current costs for this uniform are not available.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total cost of salaries since 1992 paid to persons in his Department employed on a part-time or full-time basis in any connection whatsoever in relation to the Scott inquiry. [10214]

Mr. Hanley: The direct salary cost of officials within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office wholly employed on matters relating to the Scott inquiry since 1992 is approximately £197,627.00. Other officials will inevitably be involved from time to time; their direct salary cost is unquantifiable.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has *(a)* read, collated or received and *(b)* authorised civil servants or any other persons to read, collate or receive copies of draft sections of Sir Richard Scott's report circulated by Sir Richard Scott to Government Ministers, civil servants and other persons. [10216]

Mr. Hanley: The handling of extracts of Sir Richard's draft report, subject to the wishes of the inquiry, is at the discretion of those to whom they are sent. The Government do not disclose details of correspondence between the inquiry and individual witnesses.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will provide a breakdown of the spending by his Department on external advice in relation to the Scott inquiry; and how much has been spent on legal advice and for whom. [10215]

Mr. Hanley: The amount so far spent by my Department on external advice in relation to Sir Richard Scott's inquiry is £318,165.46. The names of the individuals and their legal advisers are confidential to them.

Marshal of the Diplomatic Corps

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give an itemised breakdown of the costs relating to the marshal of the diplomatic corps in 1994–95. [8910]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* These costs are shared between the FCO and Buckingham palace. The costs of the marshal, his staff and office borne by the FCO in 1994–95 were:

	£
Salaries, national insurance contributions	51,110.00
Transport, travel and entertainment	14,148.13
Office equipment, supplies and sundries	4,731.22
Total	69,989.35

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what guidance he intends to issue to *(a)* departments, *(b)* executive agencies, *(c)* non-departmental public bodies and *(d)* outside bodies and arm's-length organisations which he has responsibility for, or an interest in, regarding the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if he will make a statement. [9220]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend, the Minister for Social Security and Disabled people on Monday 15 January, *Official Report*, column *417*.

I will ensure that this Department and any bodies for which it is responsible will be made aware of their responsibilities under the Act.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Pre-school Provision

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the number and percentage of four-year-olds in *(a)* maintained nursery schools and nursery classes, *(b)* reception classes in primary schools, *(c)* private or voluntary sector provision and *(c)* pre-school provision overall. [9059]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following table shows the breakdown between schools for four-year-olds born between 1 January 1990 and 31 August 1990. It excludes both those children who were three years old on 31 August 1994 but who were four years old on 1 January 1995, and those who were four years old on the 31 August 1994 but who were five years old on 1 January 1995—the rising fives.

A separate estimate of all children who were four years old on 1 January 1995 suggests that at that time 517,000 four-year-olds—78 per cent. of all children aged four—were attending maintained schools. We estimate that approximately 125,000 more—19 per cent. of all children aged four—were in some form of private or voluntary provision.

Pupils aged four years of age in schools in England: January 1995

School type	*Pupils*	*Percentage of population*[1]
Maintained nursery schools and nursery classes	46,058	10
Infant classes in primary schools[2]	342,395	78
Independent schools[3]	18,893	4
All schools[4]	409,451	93

[1] Full-time and part-time pupils aged four years of age at 31 August 1994 excluding pupils of compulsory school age in January 1995—the rising fives—expressed as a percentage of the relevant portion of the population aged four at 31 August 1994.
[2] Includes reception and other classes.
[3] Incudes pupils in direct grant nursery schools.
[4] Includes pupils in maintained nursery, primary and special schools, non-maintained special schools and independent schools.

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidance she intends to issue to *(a)* Departments, *(b)* executive agencies, *(c)* non-departmental public bodies and *(d)* outside bodies and arm's-length organisations which she has responsibility for, or an interest in, regarding the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if she will make a statement. [9232]

Mr. Paice: A brief guide to the Disability Discrimination Act was issued in November 1995 and further information material on the provisions of the Act will follow. We are currently consulting on a draft code of practice relating to the employment provisions in the Act and statutory guidance related to the definition of disability. Consultation on proposals for regulations under the education, employment and definition provisions of the Act is also currently underway.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security will be asking the National Disability Council, when it first meets, to produce and consult on a code of practice relating to the rights of access to goods and services. At the same time he will consult on associated regulations. All these items will be published in plenty of time to allow those with duties under the Act to prepare themselves for the introduction of the new rights. I shall ensure that the Department and any bodies for which it is responsible will be made aware of their responsibilities under the Act.

School Transport (Disabled Children)

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures are in place to ensure that the inaccessibility of school transport is not a restricting factor in integrating disabled children into mainstream schools; and if he will make a statement. [9258]

Mr. Forth: Parents of a child with a statement of special educational needs have a right to express a preference for any maintained school, mainstream or special; the local education authority must comply with that preference subject to certain conditions. One of these is that placement at the school would be compatible with the efficient use of resources, which could in some cases include the cost of transport.

The Government have recently introduced the school access initiative, which should mean that parents of disabled children have a wider choice of accessible mainstream schools. The initiative will help to reduce the need for long home-to-school journeys since one of the key criteria for demonstrating eligibility for funding is the reduction in disabled pupils' travelling times.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what sums have been spent, by grade, on staff costs for the jobseeker's allowance project in Lytham St. Annes. [9788]

Mr. Forth: The grade of staff undertaking work on the jobseeker's allowance project at Lytham St. Annes has varied depending on the work in hand. It would therefore involve disproportionate costs to provide the detailed information requested.

Around 110 staff from the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service between the grades of grade 6 to administrative assistant—or agency grade equivalents—have been involved at any one time. The salary costs since October 1994 have been £2,063,871.

There is also a contract with Information Technology Services Agency for work mainly on the JSA computer system. Staffing levels fluctuate, but about 135 people are involved. It is not possible to give the salary cost of ITSA staff since the departmental information technology/information systems financial regime means that salaries make up only part of the total paid to ITSA and are not identified separately.

Graduate Unemployment

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the level of graduate unemployment in each of the last five years. [9599]

Mr. Forth: Information on the level of unemployment amongst newly qualified graduates and among all graduates in the labour force is given in the following table:

Unemployment rates for newly qualified graduates (Great Britain)

Year of qualification	*Percentage unemployed six months after graduation*
1990	8
1991	12
1992	13
1993	12
1994	10

Source:
Surveys of first destinations of graduates.

Unemployment rates for all graduates in the labour force (UK)

Year	*Percentage unemployed*
1991	3.7
1992	4.4
1993	5.0
1994	4.3
1995	4.2

Source:
Labour Force Survey.

Non-teaching Days

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will estimate the cost to the Education Service of the five non-teaching days for which teachers are contracted. [9923]

Mr. Robin Squire: Full-time teachers are employed throughout the year, although their conditions of employment provide that they must be available for work for 195 days in any school year, of which 190 days shall be days on which they may be required to teach pupils. Consequently there is no specific cost associated with the five non-teaching days.

Local Education Authorities

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is for each local education authority in England the total *(a)* number of pupils, *(b)* education standard spending assessment for 1995–96 and 1996–97, *(c)* education budget set for 1995–96 and *(d)* delegated schools budget for 1995–96. [8688]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following table shows for each local education authority *(a)* the latest available full-time equivalent pupil numbers in LEA-maintained schools; *(b)* standard spending assessment allocations for 1995–96 and provisionally for 1996–97; *(c)* education budget set for 1995–96; and *(d)* the delegated schools budget for 1995–96. Pupil numbers in column (A) and delegated schools budgets in column (D) exclude pupils and funding for the grant-maintained sector, but standard spending assessments in column (B) and education budget in column (C) include provision for grant-maintained schools which are funded by recoupment from the relevant LEA.

Expenditure on education and latest pupil numbers

LEAs	*(A) Pupil numbers (January 1995)*	*(B) Education standard spending assessment 1995–96 £ million*	*(B) Education standard spending assessment 1996–97 (provisional) £ million*	*(C) Education budget 1995–96 £ million*	*(D) Delegated schools budget 1995–96 £ million*
Corporation of London	212	0.8	0.8	2.9	0.7
Camden	19,546	78.8	78.3	79.4	47.1
Greenwich	35,025	114.3	113.9	112	81.9
Hackney	25,184	92.8	92.1	101	56.0
Hammersmith and Fulham	14,655	57.2	56.0	62.5	34.9
Islington	23,675	80.4	81.1	82.7	56.6
Kensington and Chelsea	8,603	37.3	34.2	45.8	23.8
Lambeth	19,839	102.1	100.8	105.9	50.4
Lewisham	31,225	108	109.0	109.6	69.8
Southwark	27,686	109.9	108.8	109.1	60.6
Tower Hamlets	34,046	120.2	122.8	125.7	77.4
Wandsworth	19,683	88.7	86.3	91.4	46.8
City of Westminster	17,013	59.9	58.1	68.9	40.5
Barking	26,354	65.7	69.9	72.3	52.4
Barnet	32,349	113.7	116.7	120.5	64.0
Bexley	30,891	84.5	88.7	80	52.6
Brent	22,949	106.3	109.0	95.5	42.9
Bromley	27,055	99.6	103.8	108.1	42.7
Croydon	34,374	114.3	118.4	119.6	66.6
Ealing	31,653	108.9	112.2	109.2	61.9
Enfield	36,459	112.2	117.8	113.2	68.6
Haringey	29,737	89.1	93.4	96.9	63.5
Harrow	27,152	70.4	73.0	76.8	55.7
Havering	31,355	84.1	87.2	85.8	58.4
Hillingdon	19,190	88.9	93.8	87.2	37.4
Hounslow	31,752	90.2	94.8	89.4	63.2
Kingston upon Thames	15,360	45.9	47.1	47.3	28.1
Merton	21,398	56.3	58.1	56.4	41.9
Newham	40,598	123.8	130.4	115.2	74.9
Redbridge	34,137	94.2	98.3	95.8	67.2
Richmond upon Thames	18,427	44.3	45.9	48	37.6
Sutton	17,388	64.5	67.8	65.4	32.5
Waltham Forest	29,695	94.1	97.4	94.4	62.3
Birmingham	158,041	427.2	448.7	456.4	301.7
Coventry	49,334	115.7	119.9	130.3	94.5
Dudley	42,496	98.9	104.2	107.6	71.5
Sandwell	48,668	113.8	118.1	120.7	85.1

Expenditure on education and latest pupil numbers

LEAs	(A) Pupil numbers (January 1995)	(B) Education standard spending assessment 1995–96 £ million	1996–97 (provisional) £ million	(C) Education budget 1995–96 £ million	(D) Delegated schools budget 1995–96 £ million
Solihull	33,499	69.2	73.1	76.6	61.2
Walsall	39,829	103.7	108.6	108	67.1
Wolverhampton	38,926	96.1	99.9	101.6	68.3
Knowsley	27,929	69.6	73.1	70.3	50.7
Liverpool	77,629	202.7	209.3	200.7	139.5
St. Helens	29,284	63.3	66.6	73.2	52.1
Sefton	46,673	102.3	106.9	110	81.6
Wirral	51,099	124.1	132.3	123.8	89.4
Bolton	41,762	95.7	100.9	101.9	70.0
Bury	27,793	57.8	61.6	65.2	47.7
Manchester	69,828	182.5	188.3	174	129.3
Oldham	41,373	90.3	94.8	96.6	73.3
Rochdale	31,691	79.7	82.8	80.1	51.8
Salford	36,071	78.7	82.5	85.8	62.8
Stockport	42,537	86.1	89.8	95.4	73.4
Tameside	34,462	76.3	80.6	84.2	53.6
Trafford	29,452	72.5	76.8	78.9	46.8
Wigan	49,912	104.9	110.2	113.2	92.0
Barnsley	33,528	73.1	76.9	73.5	52.8
Doncaster	50,796	113.7	119.7	115.3	88.9
Rotherham	43,428	96.3	102.5	97.1	74.3
Sheffield	68,029	162.8	171.0	172.4	112.7
Bradford	79,325	201.9	209.9	196.1	133.8
Calderdale	24,427	72.8	77.2	75.4	39.4
Kirklees	61,082	136.7	141.6	147	101.1
Leeds	110,256	240.4	252.6	282.5	198.1
Wakefield	50,576	106.4	111.6	112.4	83.3
Gateshead	29,859	68.2	70.9	75.9	53.5
Newcastle upon Tyne	40,348	97.3	99.7	101.4	71.9
North Tyneside	30,569	65.4	68.8	69	52.5
South Tyneside	25,697	56.3	59.0	59.9	41.5
Sunderland	49,699	110.9	114.9	114	86.8
Isles of Scilly	283	1.2	1.2	1.3	0.8
Avon	136,628	298	n/a	338.8	249.7
Bedfordshire	79,193	212	220.2	209.8	135.7
Berkshire	100,175	273.3	282.3	270.4	174.8
Buckinghamshire	88,106	244.5	247.6	245.9	149.9
Cambridgeshire	84,413	226.1	237.3	243.6	139.2
Cheshire	151,947	219	349.1	222	261.9
Cleveland	99,191	332	n/a	355	167.8
Cornwall	69,254	156.2	164.9	153.6	116.4
Cumbria	59,985	161.5	170.9	172.8	99.8
Derbyshire	123,012	302.8	320.0	322.9	195.2
Devon	138,352	328.4	345.8	330.3	235.5
Dorset	77,399	198	207.5	213.5	124.3
Durham	94,876	206.9	216.7	220.2	154.2
East Sussex	88,056	212.5	219.8	221.3	163.9
Essex	137,154	540.5	566.7	548.6	241.1
Gloucestershire	51,420	174.5	183.8	175.4	80.0
Hampshire	200,172	502.6	525.3	545.6	362.2
Hereford and Worcester	95,640	219.8	228.9	217.7	157.3
Hertfordshire	129,636	371.4	387.3	380	244.6
Humberside	141,168	310.8	n/a	340.6	248.3
Isle of Wight	18,104	43.6	45.2	44.2	31.9
Kent	175,151	559.1	581.8	555.5	298.7
Lancashire	213,307	484	510.6	520.5	344.4
Leicestershire	138,244	316.4	333.3	328	237.4
Lincolnshire	64,949	199.2	213.1	221	114.3
Norfolk	92,797	234.8	243.4	255.5	162.3
North Yorkshire	105,026	223.6	185.9	243.9	185.9
Northamptonshire	84,884	209.8	222.3	216.8	145.0
Northumberland	49,842	107.6	113.6	114.5	84.7
Nottinghamshire	152,190	346.7	365.2	373.5	263.7
Oxfordshire	78,725	186.6	192.6	186.7	138.0
Shropshire	56,657	137.1	145.4	146.6	93.9
Somerset	65,039	143.5	150.9	158.6	112.7
Staffordshire	162,669	348.8	366.1	361.1	259.0
Suffolk	93,659	205.9	217.5	219.7	168.3
Surrey	103,483	299.4	307.6	306.8	187.7

Expenditure on education and latest pupil numbers

LEAs	*(A) Pupil numbers* *(January 1995)*	*(B) Education standard spending assessment* *1995–96* *£ million*	*1996–97 (provisional)* *£ million*	*(C) Education budget* *1995–96* *£ million*	*(D) Delegated schools budget* *1995–96* *£ million*
Warwickshire	68,292	156.2	164.1	164.6	113.5
West Sussex	96,023	226.8	235.5	242.3	176.0
Wiltshire	67,163	188.6	197.6	201	110.9
Bath and North East Somerset	—	—	54.4	—	—
Bristol	—	—	120.0	—	—
North Somerset	—	—	58.6	—	—
South Gloucestershire	—	—	78.6	—	—
Hartlepool	—	—	37.0	—	—
Middlesbrough	—	—	61.5	—	—
Redcar and Cleveland	—	—	59.6	—	—
Stockton on Tees	—	—	71.8	—	—
Kingston upon Hull	—	—	102.7	—	—
East Riding of Yorkshire	—	—	103.0	—	—
North East Lincolnshire	—	—	64.9	—	—
North Lincolnshire	—	—	56.4	—	—
York	—	—	52.8	—	—
Total	6,612,808	17024.4	17758.9	17821.4	11705.9

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the average cost to a local education authority of employing one teacher in London for one year. [9460]

Mr. Robin Squire: The estimated average annual cost to a local education authority of employing a full-time classroom teacher in London, as at 31 March 1994, was around £24,800. This is based on the average salary for classroom teachers in LEA-maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in the Greater London area on 31 March 1994 of around £21,500 and "on costs" at 15.55 per cent. in respect of employers' national insurance and superannuation contributions. Later figures are not yet available.

Employment Service Dispute

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the dispute within the Employment Service which began on 30 November 1995; and what action she plans to take to negotiate a settlement. [9911]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Frank Field, dated 17 January 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the current trade dispute within the Employment Service; responsibility for pay bargaining was delegated to the Agency in January 1994.

The Agency is in dispute with the Civil and Public Services Association (CPSA) over the 1995/96 pay award to those of our employees in grades represented by that union. These ES people have been paid increases, with effect from April 1995, of between 2.8% and 5.5%, depending upon their individual performance in the year ending March 1995. The majority of them received pay rises of more than 3.7%.

These pay awards were in addition to a 2.3% increase, also paid in April, for this group of employees as a consequence of CPSA agreement to a new pay structure for the grades in question.

Whilst we regret the decision taken by the CPSA to call for industrial action amongst some of its members working in the Agency, we have been clear from the outset that the pay award for 1995/96 will not be improved. The pay award is fair, and is set at a level that is all the Agncy can afford.

We have made very real efforts to reach a settlement with the CPSA, both before the dispute started and since. This included my agreement that talks should take place under the auspices of ACAS. Those talks were called off when the CPSA decided not to adhere to the agreement we had reached that it would order its striking members back to work before the talks started.

The Employment Service remains committed to finding an early resolution to the idspute to enable us to resume our normal level of service to the job seekers who use the 47 offices currently affected by strike action. Communication channels with the union, therefore, remain open. But that does not mean we are in a position to improve upon a pay award which is both competitive and at the limits of what we can afford.

I hope this is helpful.

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what are the *(a)* categories and *(b)* names of (i) statutory bodies, (ii) voluntary organisations or (iii) commercial contractors she has chosen, or is considering, to administer the production, distribution, and use of vouchers for financing (1) nursery education, (2) some infants in reception classes of primary schools and (3) an associated system of registration. [9964]

Mr. Robin Squire: Capita Managed Services Ltd. will administer the issue and redemption of nursery education vouchers in phase 1. Parents will be able to exchange their vouchers in maintained, private and voluntary providers participating in the scheme. It is proposed that Ofsted will inspect registered providers.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Departmental Costs

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what is his estimate of the total cost for himself and other departmental Ministers for each year since 1991–92, including the current year of *(a)* overseas travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers and their advisers, *(b)* car and chauffeuring costs of Ministers, *(c)* ministerial security costs and *(d)* domestic travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers; [6404]

(2) what is his estimate of the cost of running his departmental office, and that of his predecessor, for each year since 1990–91 including the current year, broken down into *(a)* telephone bills, *(b)* total staff costs, *(c)* press and communications, *(d)* entertainment, *(e)* alcoholic drinks, *(f)* non-alcoholic drinks, *(g)* stationery, *(h)* office refurbishment and *(i)* other. [6403]

Mr. Lang: The total running cost of the DTI ministerial organisation, including Ministers' offices, parliamentary branch and the office of the permanent secretary, is as follows. Figures for the office of the President of the Board of Trade are also shown.

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
President's office	565,000	735,000	874,000	883,000	829,000
Total cost of ministerial organisation	1,840,000	2,354,000	3,225,000	3,849,000	3,898,000

[1] Costs based on current estimates.

Expenditure is not classified under all the headings specified and figures could be calculated only at disproportionate cost. Equivalent headings are shown as follows. Office refurbishment and press office are not disaggregated to the ministerial organisation: these are costed centrally.

Estimated costs for 1995–96—ministerial organisation, including parliamentary branch and the office of the permanent secretary

	Total cost of ministerial organisation	*President's Office*
Total running costs	3,898,000	829,000
Travel and subsistence (including ministerial car service, domestic and foreign travel)	875,000	149,000
Entertainment (includes alcoholic/non-alcoholic drinks)	52,000	10,000
Stationery	85,000	19,000
Staff costs (includes ministerial salaries)	2,377,000	582,000
Other	509,000	69,000

Brazilian Mahogany

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many cubic metres of Brazilian mahogany were imported into the United Kingdom in 1995 from Brazil. [8538]

Mr. Oppenheim: There are no official sources on imports of Brazilian mahogany into the United Kingdom. The information has not been available since 1992, when the United Kingdom trade classification no longer separately identified mahogany from other non-coniferous woods.

China

Mr. Spellar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the latest available figures for the balance of trade with China. [9028]

Mr. Oppenheim: In the 12 months ended November 1995, UK exports to China were worth £0.8 billion while imports were worth £1.9 billion, resulting in a crude trade deficit of £1.1 billion.

Post Offices

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many Crown post offices there were *(a)* in 1990 and *(b)* at the latest date for which figures are available. [9112]

Mr. Oppenheim: I understand from the Post Office that the numbers of Crown post offices in the United Kingdom as at 1 April 1990 and 31 December 1995 are as indicated in the table. The number of main post offices, which offer customers the full range of post office services, are also indicated.

	Main post offices crown and agency offices	*Crown post offices*
1 April 1990	1,492	1,339
31 December 1995	1,518	677

Manufactures

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish a table showing unit values for United Kingdom exports and imports of manufactures for each quarter since 1990, based on 1985=100. [9781]

Mr. Oppenheim: Information based on 1985=100 is not available. Information based on 1990=100 is published by the Central Statistical Office in the monthly review of external trade statistics, which is available in the Library of the House. It is also available on the central shared database, which may be accessed from the Library.

Manufacturing Output

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish a table, based on 1985=100, showing the volume of manufacturing output less fuel, food, drink and tobacco for each year since 1970. [9780]

Mr. Oppenheim: Information based on 1985=100 is not available. Information based on the standard industrial classification 1992 and 1990=100 is available from 1986 and is given in the table.

Index of production for manufacturing less fuel[1] food, drink and tobacco

Year	
1986	83.7
1987	88.3
1988	95.4
1989	100.4
1990	100.0
1991	93.4
1992	92.4
1993	93.7
1994	98.2

[1] For fuel the standard industrial classification 1992 subsection DF has been used.

Trade (United States)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the likely effect on the United Kingdom balance of visible trade with the United States resulting from measures taken to eliminate the United States visible deficit. [9795]

Mr. Oppenheim: Any estimate of the likely effect on the UK balance of visible trade with the US resulting from as yet unspecified measures to eliminate the US visibles deficit is complex and dependant on a number of factors including movements in exchange rates, levels of demand in the two countries and price and income elasticities. Assessing the interaction of these and/or other factors could not be reliably undertaken except at disproportionate cost.

Competitions (Telephone Premium Rates)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make the running of pseudo-competitions using telephone premium rate lines illegal. [9899]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Premium rate telephone services are regulated by the Independent Committee for the Supervision of Standards of Telephone Information Services, ICSTIS. The ICSTIS code of practice contains a number of detailed regulations regarding these competitions and their promotion. In the light of current concerns, ICSTIS has instigated a review of competitions; the findings are expected by the end of March 1996. In the event of breaches of its code, ICSTIS has a number of sanctions—including fines and barring service providers from providing premium rate services—which are regularly invoked. I understand that a copy of the current ICSTIS code is already available in the Library of the House.

Brewing Industry

Sir Roger Moate: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards the review by the European Commission of the block exemption of British brewers with regard to the tied house system; what steps are being taken to safeguard the interests of brewers and licensees; what assessment he has made of level of support in the European Union for the proposal to continue the exemption after 1997; and what plans Her Majesty's Government have to secure alternative provision for British brewers. [9924]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The block exemption which deals with the tie between brewer and landlord will first be considered as part of a wider debate on the treatment of distribution agreements under EC competition law. The Commission will publish a green paper on this issue later this year. Consideration of specific types of agreement such as the tie will follow on from the green paper, at which time my Department will consider the specific interests of the UK's brewing industry.

Whatever the outcome of the wider review, my Department will oppose any changes to the block exemption dealing with the tie which would result in the UK's brewers finding themselves in an unfair position compared with brewers in other member states.

Industrial Death and Retirement Scheme

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will distinguish, in each year since 1990, the amount of interest earned by payments into the industrial death and retirement fund by members and interest earned by the whole fund; [10092]

(2) what was the difference between the sum paid out as benefit from the industrial death and retirement fund in the 12 months up to its closure and the amount earned in interest by the fund in the period between 7 June 1995 and 21 October 1995; [10090]

(3) if the industrial death and retirement fund will be accepting new claims for industrial injury or disablement arising before 1 June; [10093]

(4) if actuarial reports on the industrial death and retirement fund reported on the level of contributions paid in and the amount of benefit paid out from the fund. [10091]

Mr. Page: These are matters for British Coal. I am asking the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received on the winding-up of the industrial death and retirement fund by British Coal; and if he will make a statement. [8686]

Mr. Page: The industrial death and retirement scheme—there was no fund as such—was closed by British Coal on 6 January 1995 with the agreement of the Department, due notice having been given to the trades unions involved. All representations received since then have been referred to British Coal.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what legal costs, arising from the Scott inquiry, have been incurred by the Department on behalf of current and past *(a)* civil servants and *(b)* advisers and secondees; [8747]

(2) what legal costs, arising from the Scott inquiry, have been incurred by his Department on behalf of Ministers and ex-Ministers; and if he will name the individuals concerned. [8754]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* The value of legal services charged by the Treasury Solicitor's Department, with accounts settled to date from public funds for the provision of external legal services incurred on behalf of Ministers, ex-Ministers and civil servants of my Department in connection with the Scott inquiry is £293,870. No legal costs have been incurred on behalf of other advisors or secondees. The cost of any advice in connection with the Scott inquiry given by Government's lawyers as part of their normal duties cannot be quantified. It is not the Government's policy to identify the individuals who have received legal advice, either *directly* or *indirectly*.

Trade Figures

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the European countries with which the United Kingdom has *(a)* a trade surplus and *(b)* a deficit between the second quarter of 1979 and the present day. [7023]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 19 December 1995]:* The most recent figures for visible trade show that, between the second quarter of 1979 and the third quarter of 1995, the UK had a crude trade surplus with the Irish Republic, Spain and Greece and a crude trade deficit with Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium/Luxembourg, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Austria, Portugal, Norway and Switzerland. The smaller western European countries and those of eastern Europe have been excluded because to provide the relevant figures for them would involve disproportionate cost.

Information on UK trade in invisibles prior to 1988 is not available for individual countries. Between 1988 and 1994, the UK has had an invisible surplus with Denmark, the Republic of Ireland, Italy, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Finland and a deficit with the other countries of the EC and the European Free Trade Association.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Attorney-General if he will provide a breakdown of the spending by his Department on external advice in relation to the Scott inquiry; and how much has been spent on legal advice and for whom. [10229]

The Attorney-General: The amount so far spent for the legal secretariat to the Law Officers and Treasury Solicitor's Department on external advice in relation to Sir Richard Scott's inquiry is £34,463. The names of the individuals and their legal advisers are confidential to them.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Attorney-General what is the total cost of salaries since 1992 paid to persons in his Department employed on a part-time or full-time basis in any connection in relation to the Scott inquiry. [10228]

The Attorney-General: A number of staff in my Departments work on matters related to the Scott inquiry from time to time as part of their duties and it is not possible to estimate the overall cost.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Attorney-General if he has *(a)* read, collated or received and *(b)* authorised civil servants or any other persons to read, collate or receive copies of draft sections of Sir Richard Scott's report circulated by Sir Richard Scott to Ministers, civil servants and other persons. [10230]

The Attorney-General: The handling of extracts of Sir Richard's draft report, subject to guidance received from the inquiry, is for those to whom they are sent. The Government do not disclose details of correspondence between the inquiry and individual witnesses.

Jane Dixon

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Attorney-General what was the total cost to public funds of the legal proceedings recently taken against Jane Dixon at Plymouth Crown court. [10172]

The Solicitor-General: Legal proceedings against Jane Tucker involved a number of hearings on separate occasions in the magistrates court and the Crown court. The first trial in the Crown court had to be abandoned after three days when jurors were discharged. The retrial was held over four days.

The cost to the Crown Prosecution Service in instructing counsel to appear in the Crown court was £3,388.99 and I understand that the approximate cost to the Court Service of a day's hearing in the Crown court, including judge time, is £2,040. However, in assessing the total cost to public funds of all the proceedings it is also necessary to take account of (1) the cost of proceedings in the magistrates court and the administrative prosecution costs involved in processing the case, which are not available; and (2) defence costs, which I understand have not yet been submitted for taxation.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Violent Crime

14. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the increase in violent crime since 1979 *(a)* in London and *(b)* in the United Kingdom. [7861]

Mr. Howard: Since 1979, there has been an increase of 203 per cent. in the Metropolitan police district, compared with 138 per cent. in England and Wales; for the City of London police force area, recorded violent crime fell by 33 per cent. Figures for Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for the respective Secretaries of State.

21. **Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the change in the rate of crimes of violence against the person since 1979 in *(a)* London and *(b)* England and Wales. [7869]

Mr. Howard: Since 1979, there has been an increase of 168 per cent. in the rate of crimes of violence against the person in the Metropolitan police district compared with 128 per cent. in England and Wales. But in the City of London police area, recorded crimes of violence against the person fell by 29 per cent. over the same period. The category of crime about which the hon. Gentleman has asked is different from the category in the question from his hon. Friend, the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) which I have just answered.

Security (Lichfield)

15. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will visit Lichfield to review city centre security; and if he will make a statement. [7862]

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend has no immediate plans to visit Lichfield. As my hon. Friend will know, however, Lichfield was a successful bidder in last year's closed circuit television challenge competition, receiving a grant of more than £93,000. I understand that the CCTV system is due on-line in the spring. I am sure that this will provide an enhanced level of security in the city centre.

Ministerial Visits

16. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which Ministers visited the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man in 1995; and what subjects were discussed. [7863]

Mr. Sackville: My right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Blatch visited the Channel Islands on 18–21 April 1995. She discussed a wide range of issues, including the islands' relationship with the European Union and fisheries.

Boot Camps

17. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning the establishment of boot camps in the United Kingdom. [7864]

Miss Widdecombe: Twenty-four written or oral representations have been made by hon. Members. In addition, 113 letters are recorded as having been received from individuals and organisations expressing views both for and against the introduction of boot camps.

Obscenity and Pornography

18. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further measures he is taking to combat obscenity and pornography. [7866]

Mr. Sackville: The Government will continue to monitor the adequacy and effectiveness of our controls on obscene and pornographic material. To this end, the interdepartmental group on obscenity is currently looking at the dissemination of, and ways of controlling access to, pornography on computer networks.

Wheel Clamping

19. **Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on current policy regarding wheel clamping on private land; and what proposals he has in this regard. [7867]

Mr. Maclean: The Government believe that wheelclamping can be a sensible and effective means of controlling parking on private land if it is carried out responsibly, taking proper account of the legitimate rights and interests of motorists. In other circumstances it can given rise to problems.

The Government are considering what action, if any, should be taken to deal with these problems.

Metropolitan Police

20. **Mr. Sims:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the size of the Metropolitan police service and the resources available to it. [7868]

Mr. Howard: The Government are making available £1.65 billion to the Metropolitan police in 1996–97—£20.5 million more than last year. In addition, the 2 per cent. ceiling on the amount the Metropolitan police can carry forward from one year to the next has been removed. This is likely to be worth an extra £25 million on top of the existing maximum of £34 million. I have not yet received the Commissioner's detailed expenditure proposals for 1996–97, but I expect to see even more officers deployed on the streets of London during 1996–97.

Crime (Women's Fears)

22. **Ms Corston:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what studies his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated of the fear of crime among women. [7870]

Mr. Maclean: There are 11 publications on this subject and I have arranged for a list of these, together with copies of the actual studies to be lodged in the House of Commons Library.

25. **Ms Church:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps his Department is taking to combat the fear of crime among women. [7874]

Mr. Maclean: We are aware that women are generally more fearful of becoming victimes of crime, and for that reason women can be seen as the primary interest group in our crime prevention activities.

The best way to tackle fear of crime is to tackle crime itself. We continue to pursue a comprehensive strategy to combat crime, through the second phase of the partnership campaign which was launched this month; through the provision of practical advice on measures which people can take to help keep themselves safe; and through the use of technology, such as closed circuit television. The Home Secretary recently announced a new competition which will inject another £15 million into CCTV schemes up and down the country.

We are also aware of the need to tackle domestic violence; and we have established inter-departmental groups at official and ministerial level to promote a

co-ordinated response to the problem at a national and local level. And the recent public awareness campaign placed the issue firmly on the public agenda.

Last year the Government published an interagency circular on domestic violence which set out the Government's approach to the issue and encouraged a more co-ordinated response to the problem by local agencies.

Police Station Closures

23. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give details of the numbers of police station closures and downgradings since 1987; and if he will make a statement. [7872]

Mr. Maclean: The information is not collected centrally.

Holloway Prison

24. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of conditions at *(a)* Holloway prison and *(b)* other prisons at which women prisoners are being held. [7873]

Miss Widdecombe: The current conditions at Holloway have been brought to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend by the Chief Inspector of Prisons. He expressed grave concern over a restricted regime, poor hygiene and cleanliness, poor standards of health care, low staff morale and the general management of the establishment.

I have asked the temporary Director General of the Prison Service to add to steps already taken before the chief inspector's visit to bring the establishment up to an acceptable operational standard.

Livestock Rustling

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has had about the incidence of livestock rustling; and how many such offences have been reported to the police in recent years. [9714]

Mr. Maclean: One hon. Friend has written, and one hon. Member has asked a previous question about the theft of livestock.

Statistics on the theft of livestock are not held centrally.

Anti-crime Measures

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the contribution to combating crime arising from the introduction of *(a)* the national DNA database and *(b)* closed circuit television; and what plans he has to expand the scope of each. [9690]

Mr. Maclean: The national DNA database was launched in April 1995. On 17 January 1996, the database held over 23,000 DNA profiles and 284 matches had been made between suspects and scenes of crime, or between one scene of crime and another. Of these matches, 15 were across police force boundaries.

The Government welcome the developing use of closed circuit television in the fight against crime. The experience of CCTV operators and the police is that CCTV can make a significant contribution to the prevention and detection of crime and to reduction of the fear of crime.

In order to help further expand the use of CCTV, my right hon. and learned Friend recently announced that £15 million had been made available for another CCTV challenge competition. Our aim is to place 10,000 more CCTV cameras on the streets of Britain over the next three years.

Parish Special Constables

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many parish special constables are now in place, and in which counties or police areas; how many he expects to be in place by 30 June 1996; and if he will make a statement. [9710]

Mr. Maclean: The parish special constable initiative has been extended to include urban areas and the volunteers involved are now known nationally as neighbourhood special constables. Neighbourhood special constables spend the majority of their time on duty on foot patrol either alone or as part of a policing team within an agreed neighbourhood or geographic area more limited than that in which other special constabulary colleagues are deployed. According to police force returns 1,595 special constables in England and Wales are neighbourhood specials. A breakdown of the numbers by police force areas is recorded in the table.

It is for chief officers to recruit or designate volunteers as neighbourhood special constables, and a forecast for 30 June 1996 cannot be provided. Our initial target for forces of 1,000 neighbourhood special constables by the end of 1995 has been met and we believe that the target of 3,000 by the end of 1996 will also be achieved.

	Number
Avon and Somerset	0
Bedfordshire	3
Cambridgeshire	7
Cheshire	7
City of London	0
Cleveland	0
Cumbria	0
Derbyshire	40
Devon and Cornwall	0
Dorset	0
Durham	10
Dyfed/Powys	217
Essex	9
Gloucestershire	0
Greater Manchester	0
Gwent	9
Hampshire	262
Hertfordshire	82
Humberside	0
Kent	81
Lancashire	1
Leicestershire	26
Lincolnshire	47
Merseyside	0

	Number
Metropolitan	143
Norfolk	324
Northamptonshire	0
Northumbria	5
North Wales	0
North Yorkshire	6
Nottinghamshire	0
South Wales	1
South Yorkshire	8
Staffordshire	0
Suffolk	18
Surrey	7
Sussex	1
Thames Valley	7
Warwickshire	106
West Mercia	148
West Midlands	7
West Yorkshire	9
Wiltshire	4
Total	1,595

Mr. Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what difficulties *(a)* he has experienced or *(b)* have been reported to him, regarding the development of a network of parish special constables; and if he will make a statement. [9711]

Mr. Maclean: Last September, the Home Office published the results of research into the parish constables initiative, with particular attention given to four schemes at Ironville, Derbyshire; Pembury in Kent; Sleights in North Yorkshire; and Yetminster in Dorset. A copy of the report entitled "The Parish Special Constables Scheme" has been placed in the Library. This was a close look at the initiative in its early days and the study identified a number of important issues; such as the importance of selecting the right person for the job, consultation with local people, and good links with the regular police.

When the initiative was subsumed by that of the neighbourhood special constable in autumn 1994, a proportion of the public mistakenly believed that neighbourhood constables were to be regular officers. This has been addressed by the inclusion of "special" in their title and recent advertising. In addition, some police forces have been slow to identify any of their specials as neighbourhood special constables even though they may perform the neighbourhood special role. This has caused some difficulty in recording accurately the number of specials who undertake neighbourhood specials' duties.

Internet

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on any proposed meeting with Internet service providers to discuss current laws and regulations concerning the use of the Internet. [9680]

Mr. Sackville: The interdepartmental group on obscenity is currently considering the issue of pornographic material disseminated via computer networks, such as the Internet, and it has arranged a meeting with the Internet service providers in the United Kingdom to discuss the possible measures which can be taken to control access to such material.

The general issue of regulation of the Internet and other computer networks is a matter for my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Police Houses

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many police houses have been sold since 1990; what is his estimate of *(a)* the number and *(b)* the proportion of these sales in rural areas and villages; and if he will make a statement on future plans and expected trends in sales; [9712]

(2) what representations he has had about the sale of police houses in rural areas and the consequences of such sales for the number of resident police constables; and if he will make a statement. [9713]

Mr. Maclean: Information about sales over the period specified is not readily available. Figures published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy indicate that the number of police houses in England and Wales fell by 3,282 between 1 April 1990 and 1 April 1995. Estimates of numbers and proportions of sales in rural areas and villages could be obtained only at disproportionate cost by making inquiries of each police force. We will continue to encourage the police to dispose of surplus housing in the interests of efficiency and value for money, but these are budgetary and operational matters for local decision.

We receive from time to time representations, most recently from my hon. Friend, about the operational implications of the sale of police houses in rural areas. The deployment of officers within forces is a matter for chief constables but the most effective use of resources within a particular area can often be achieved by deploying officers from a central command point.

Police Response Times

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what *(a)* recommendations and *(b)* requirements exist for police response times in rural areas; and what percentage of calls do not meet these response times. [9715]

Mr. Maclean: One of the Audit Commission's citizens charter police performance indicators requires the setting of target times for incidents which require an immediate response. The setting of these targets is a local matter, and some forces choose to set separate targets for rural areas. The latest targets, and performance against them, are published in the report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary 1994–95, a copy of which is in the Library.

Car Dealers

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans she has to increase the penalties for car dealers who repeatedly sell cars in a dangerous condition. [9867]

Mr. Maclean: The maximum penalty for an offence of selling or offering to sell an unroadworthy vehicle is a fine of £5,000. We have no plans to increase this penalty at present.

Libya (Extradition)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek to initiate an extradition treaty with Libya. [8168]

Mr. Kirkhope: The Government have no plans to do so.

Football Clubs (Arrests)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many arrests have been made inside London Premiership and Football League clubs in each of the last three complete seasons and season 1995–96 to date. [8915]

Mr. Maclean: According to records held by the National Criminal Intelligence Service football unit, the numbers of arrests inside London Premiership and League clubs in the relevant seasons are as follows:

1992–93: 245

1993–94: 244

1994–95: 334

1995–96: 155 (to date).

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has *(a)* read or received and *(b)* authorised civil servants or any other persons to collate or receive copies of draft sections of Sir Richard Scott's report circulated by Sir Richard Scott to Government Ministers, civil servants and other persons. [10209]

Mr. Howard: No.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total cost of salaries since 1992 paid to persons in his Department employed on a part-time or full-time basis in any connection in relation to the Scott inquiry. [10210]

Mr. Howard: There are no officials in my Department wholly employed on matters relating to the Scott inquiry. Some officials are involved on an occasional basis as part of their normal duties; the direct salary cost is unquantifiable.

Thames Valley Police

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the budget set by the Thames Valley police both in cash and in real terms, and the number of police officers and civilians employed by the Thames Valley police in each of the last 16 years. [9293]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* The information requested is in the tables:

Year	*Number of police officers employed by Thames Valley police*	*Number of civilians employed by Thames Valley police*
31 March 1980	2,802	984
31 March 1981	3,093	1,016
31 March 1982	3,098	1,023
31 March 1983	3,123	1,054
31 March 1984	3,176	1,083
31 March 1985	3,259	1,104
31 March 1986	3,297	1,188
31 March 1987	3,421	1,161
31 March 1988	3,490	1,182
31 March 1989	3,600	1,187
31 March 1990	3,659	1,267
31 March 1991	3,714	1,359
31 March 1992	3,772	1,423
31 March 1993	3,840	1,478
31 March 1994	3,908	1,522
31 March 1995	3,854	1,706

£ million

Year	*Thames Valley police budget in cash terms*[1]	*Thames Valley police budget in real terms*[2]
1980—81	40.06	84.60
1981–82	48.50	93.40
1982–83	55.33	99.47
1983–84	60.58	104.08
1984–85	66.83	109.32
1985–86	72.43	112.32
1986–87	82.15	123.66
1987–88	91.72	131.09
1988–89	100.69	134.89
1989–90	112.56	140.95
1990–91	131.16	152.05
1991–92	147.14	160.55
1992–93	161.54	169.37
1993–94	180.96	184.35
1994–95	[3]189.68	189.68
1995–96	194.41	189.21
1996–97	[4]203.70	192.94

[1] Original budgets voted by the police authority (this information has been provided by the Thames Valley Police Authority). Until 1993–94 the authority's original budgets were prepared at a November price base (i.e. November 1992 for the 1993–94 estimates). From 1994–95 onwards the authority's original budgets were produced at outturn prices.

[2] Calculated at 1994–95 prices using Treasury GDP deflators.

[3] Notional budget used for capping purposes in the first year of the new funding arrangements (1995–96).

[4] Proposed total spending power available to Thames Valley Police Authority for 1996–97.

Charges by Bailiffs

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what regulations apply on the levying of charges by bailiffs against individuals from whom they are charged to collect fines. [9113]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I have been asked to reply. Where a magistrates' court seeks to enforce payment of a fine by issuing a distress warrant and directing it to a bailiff, the levying of charges by the bailiff for the execution of the distress warrant is governed by section 78 of the Magistrates' Courts Act 1980, as amended by section 46 of the Criminal Justice Act 1982, and by rule 54 of the Magistrates' Courts Rules 1981.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the cost of chauffeur-driven cars used by his Department was in each of the past five years. [5856]

Sir John Wheeler: The information available is as follows:

1991–92: £367,000[1]

1992–93: £420,000[1]

1993–94: £1,406,000

1994–95: £1,543,000[1]

1995–96: £653,000 to date.

[1] Includes purchase of new vehicles.

The 1991–92 and 1992–93 figures are not available for cars used by the Northern Ireland Office, London or for the Northern Ireland Office, Belfast contract cars.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is her estimate of the total cost for herself and other departmental Ministers for each year since 1991–92, including the current year of *(a)* overseas travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers and their advisers, *(b)* car and chauffeuring costs of Ministers, *(c)* ministerial security costs and *(d)* domestic travel and accommodation expenses of Ministers. [6390]

Sir John Wheeler: The information could be supplied in the format requested only at disproportionate cost. However, the overall cost of ministerial travel including the cost of escort cars and of ministerial support staff is as follows.

1991–92: £1,340,000

1992–93: £1,315,000

1993–94: £1,363,000[1]

1994–95: £1,460,000[1]

1995–96: £1,432,000[1]

[1] Figures for 1993–94—1995–96 include accommodation costs for the Secretary of State in London.

Action for Community Employment

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has to reduce funding for ACE projects; what is the estimated saving to public funds; if there is still recruitment to ACE schemes; how the proposals will be implemented; what representations on ACE funding he has received in the past two months; and if he will make a statement. [8972]

Mr. Ancram: Responsibility for this subject has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Ian Walters. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Ian Walters to Mr. John D. Taylor, dated 16 January 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency to reply to your questions about the Action for Community Employment (ACE) programme.

As you know, on Monday 11 December 1995 the Secretary of State announced details of the Public Expenditure Plans for Northern Ireland for 1996/97 and the following two years. The announcement referred to the very encouraging performance of the Northern Ireland economy with unemployment now at its lowest level for 14 years and employment at record levels. He mentioned also the promise of substantial jobs from recently announced investments by major companies.

Against that background the Secretary of State indicated a reduction in the funding for the ACE programme (which amounts to £12.5 million in 1996/97) to meet pressures in top priority programmes aimed at promoting self-sustaining economic growth. The targeting of available resources in this way will best meet the needs of the unemployed in the longer term.

This Agency has recently written to the Chairpersons of ACE schemes to indicate the level of reduction required in each scheme to ensure that the programme operates within the resources available to it in 1996/97. Following consultations with a variety of sponsors and others with an interest in ACE, the Agency has agreed to allow ACE sponsors to determine how best they might achieve the reduction either individually or collectively. The Agency has also lifted the freeze on further recruitment into the programme which was imposed temporarily to facilitate an orderly contraction of the programme.

With regard to representations, I met before Christmas several voluntary and community organisations which operate ACE schemes to discuss how the reduction could be best achieved. On 10 January I met a delegation from Belfast City Council. There has been a flurry of correspondence also with Baroness Denton and myself. The Minister plans to meet public representatives later this month.

I hope that you find this reply useful. I will of course be pleased to provide further information if you would find it helpful.

Gun Licences

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what grounds a gun licence may be refused. [8689]

Sir John Wheeler: Under the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 1981, a firearm certificate shall not be granted unless the Chief Constable is satisfied that:

the firearm could be held without danger to public safety or to the peace; or

the applicant is fitted to hold a firearm; or

the applicant has 'good reason' for the firearm; or

the applicant is not prohibited from holding a firearm by virtue of article 22 of the order;

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many applications for gun licences have been made in each of the last five years; and how many have been refused and for what reasons. [8644]

Sir John Wheeler: Applications for firearm certificates in the last five years are as follows:

	Applications	*Refusals*
1991	2,857	343
1992	2,975	561
1993	3,496	474
1994	3,799	615
1995 (to 30 November)	2,985	510

Firearm certificates are refused in accordance with the criteria specified in article 28 of the Firearms (NI) Order 1981. A breakdown to show the reason for each refusal would incur disproportionate cost.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many gun licences are currently in existence; for how many guns; and what is the breakdown *(a)* of these weapons by (i) type and (ii) declared purpose

and *(b)* of the licence holders by (1) background and (2) location. [8643]

Sir John Wheeler: At 30 November 1995 there were 88,092 firearm certificates in Northern Ireland on which 133,869 weapons were held.

	Number
Shotguns	85,204
Pistols and revolvers	13,044
Rifles	13,777
Air weapons	21,004
Miscellaneous[1]	840

[1] Includes humane killers, signal pistols, starting pistols, collectors items and spear guns.

Information regarding the declared purposes for which the firearms were sought and the background and location of certificate holders, is not held separately and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Housing Grant

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Housing Executive expects to complete its next review of the costings it employs in determining the amount of grant aid to be paid under its housing grant schemes; when the last review was completed; and when the present level of costings was applied to the determination of these schemes. [9122]

Mr. Moss: It is assumed that the costings in question refer to the schedule of rates which the Northern Ireland Housing Executive uses to draw up an estimate of the cost of grant-aided works. This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive whose chief executive has advised me that costings are monitored and adjusted if necessary, on an ongoing basis, and are reviewed annually. The next annual review is due in April 1996. The last review was completed in, and implemented from, April 1995 and forms the basis of the present costings.

Education Administration

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which political parties and other bodies he has met to discuss reforms of educational administration; and when he intends to announce his proposals. [8638]

Mr. Ancram: The present round of consultation on educational administration which I announced in my statement of 7 September has been limited to the main political parties in Northern Ireland. Meetings have been held with the following:

The Alliance Party of Northern Ireland

The Social Democratic and Labour Party

Mr. R. McCartney QC MP—United Kingdom Unionist

The Conservative Party

Sinn Fein

Democratic Left

The Workers' Party

The Ulster Democratic Party

Labour in Northern Ireland

Meetings are also planned to take place with the Ulster Unionist party, the Democratic Unionist party and the Progressive Unionist party.

Decisions will be announced only after I have given full consideration to all the views put to me; it is therefore not possible at this time to be specific as to the date of such an announcement.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action heads of his Department's executive agencies are taking to safeguard the provision of pre-retirement courses; and if he will make a statement. [9141]

Sir John Wheeler: Staff in agencies of the Northern Ireland Departments have access to the pre-retirement courses provided by the management development centre—MDC—of the Department of Finance and Personnel, which are supported by the chief executives and which are planned to continue for the foreseeable future.

Agencies of the Northern Ireland Office attend pre-retirement courses provided by its training and development branch; these courses are, and will continue to be, demand-led. Staff also have access to the pre-retirement courses provided by MDC.

Wind Farms

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a map showing all present and projected wind farms in Northern Ireland and all 33 kV electricity supply lines which are planned for construction within three miles of such sites over the next three years or as much information and for such periods as is available to him. [9124]

Mr. Ancram: A map showing the detailed information requested is not available. A drawing indicating the general location of present and projected wind farms and associated 33 kV lines has been placed in the Library. Northern Ireland Electricity plc has no firm plans to construct additional 33 kV lines within three miles of known wind farm sites.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what review he has carried out into the boundaries of areas of outstanding natural beauty in Northern Ireland; and when he expects to publish the results. [9123]

Mr. Moss: The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland has been reviewing the boundaries of areas of outstanding natural beauty since the introduction of the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985. This legislation gives AONBs a broader conservation objective than the Amenity Lands Act (Northern Ireland) 1965 under which nine AONBs were originally designated.

To date four AONBs have been reviewed and redesignated under the new legislation. In each case there

has been extensive public consultation both on the boundaries and on Government policies and proposals for each area. Presently a review of the Strangford Lough AONB is underway and the Department has commissioned a landscape assessment prior to commencing a review of the Sperrin and North Derry AONBs.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the estimated level of Government financial support for each local authority, and for Northern Ireland as a whole in constant prices for *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96 and *(c)* 1996–97, indicating the percentage yearly change in each case and the overall cumulative change (i) net of community care and (ii) including community care. [8888]

Mr. Moss *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* It is not possible to provide the information exactly in the form requested, as the provision of community care in Northern Ireland is the responsibility of health and social services boards rather than local authorities. The chart shows the estimated level of the financial support paid by the Department of the Enviornment for Northern Ireland, by means of general Exchequer grant, to each of the 26 district councils in Northern Ireland. Other Northern Ireland Departments also make specific grants to district councils to assist both capital and revenue programmes relating to such matters as the arts, sports and tourism.

Table showing estimated level of Government financial support for each local authority and for Northern Ireland as a whole in constant prices (1995–96)

	1994–95 £	*Percentage change 1994–95 to 1995–96*	*1995–96* £	*Percentage change 1995–96 to 1996–97*	*1996–97* £	*Overall cumulative change*
Antrim	308,819	8.59	335,342	22.79	411,750	33.33
Ards	1,974,410	–4.39	1,887,808	–11.85	1,664,032	–15.72
Armagh	1,886,418	7.43	2,026,595	–13.69	1,749,221	–7.27
Ballymena	683,399	14.07	779,530	–2.09	763,263	11.69
Ballymoney	891,124	0.98	899,864	–11.07	800,286	–10.19
Banbridge	935,196	17.87	1,102,325	–9.86	993,668	6.25
Belfast	6,167,324	1.54	6,262,343	3.23	6,464,541	4.82
Carrickfergus	816,150	6.50	869,165	–54.86	392,366	–51.92
Castlereagh	1,067,963	–14.52	912,934	9.05	995,531	–6.78
Coleraine	416,318	2.09	425,025	6.17	451,233	8.39
Cookstown	957,895	7.68	1,031,469	8.26	1,116,623	–16.57
Craigavon	2,199,775	–4.60	2,098,505	–3.10	2,033,368	–7.56
Derry	3,636,801	–12.81	3,170,883	–16.99	2,632,202	–27.62
Down	2,162,254	1.21	2,188,385	–3.60	2,109,288	–2.45
Dungannon	1,619,829	–1.72	1,591,994	–4.52	1,519,996	–6.17
Fermanagh	1,909,876	–9.30	1,732,324	–7.19	1,607,803	–15.82
Larne	772,214	8.81	840,230	–28.56	600,302	–22.26
Limavady	992,078	7.87	1,070,145	–5.96	1,006,341	1.44
Lisburn	1,952,817	–20.06	1,561,015	–5.93	1,468,383	–24.81
Magherafelt	1,187,749	12.65	1,337,954	8.62	1,453,342	22.36
Moyle	575,179	–5.23	545,049	–5.26	516,362	–10.23
Newry and Mourne	3,858,546	–7.60	3,565,337	–8.73	3,253,968	–15.67
Newtownabbey	1,421,212	5.85	1,504,396	–8.95	1,369,712	–3.62
North Down	1,261,446	–30.23	880,261	–36.11	562,348	–55.42
Omagh	1,777,055	–2.91	1,828,841	–6.80	1,704,561	–4.08
Strabane	1,864,718	–1.97	1,827,997	–1.33	1,803,594	–3.28
Totals	43,296,565	–2.36	42,275,616	–6.70	39,444,054	–8.90

SOCIAL SECURITY

Retirement Pensions

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will consider making a substantial increase in the additional state retirement pension paid to pensioners over 80 years of age; and if he will make a statement. [9152]

Mr. Heald: We have no plans to uprate the 25p addition which is paid to all pensioners from the age of 80. The income support scheme also provides from that age a higher pensioner premium which is increased regularly.

This premium, we believe, is of far more help to pensioners on low incomes, and a more effective use of resources, than increasing the existing 25p age addition for all pensioners aged 80 and over regardless of individual need.

Child Support Agency

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many employees have been dismissed from each Child Support Agency centre since its creation. [8119]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 16 January 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about staff dismissed from Child Support Agency Centres.

Staff can be dismissed for a variety of reasons ranging from failure to meet the required performance standards during probation, through inefficiency and up to misconduct.

The figures for staff dismissed in each Child Support Agency Centre (CSAC) since its creation in April 1993 are as follows:

CSAC	*Number of dismissals*
Plymouth	16
Hastings	9
Birkenhead	5
Dudley	23
Falkirk	23

The figures do not include any information on staff dismissed within the Belfast CSAC. This is because staffing issues at this CSAC are the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Child Support Agency.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the effect on maintenance collected to be set against public funds of taking on the Child Support Agency cases deferred in December 1994. [8140]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 16 January 1996:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the effect on maintenance collected to be set against public funds of taking on the Child Support Agency cases deferred in December 1994.

As you are aware at that time the Agency deferred taking on an estimated 340,000 cases. The Secretary of State set the Agency a milestone target to commence the take on of these cases by the end of 1995. We started taking on the remaining cases in November last year, but in practice had already started to deal with many of them where the parent with care had asked us to do so.

Until the absent parent's circumstances are known it would be impossible to produce a meaningful estimate of the effect of taking on these cases on public funds. We could only do this by examining every deferred case that has subsequently been assessed. These would be impossible to identify.

In practice we do not believe the effect on public funds will be very great because a significant number of the deferred cases will be those in which the parent with care had no incentive to pursue their application because the absent parent was on income support.

Deferring the take on of these cases enabled us to concentrate on new cases and those that were more likely to result in a positive outcome for the parent with care and the general taxpayer. We believe that this approach will have been of overall benefit to public funds.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many complaints have been made to the Child Support Agency since its inception; how many complaints have been upheld; in how many cases financial compensation has been paid and on what grounds; and what have been the amounts paid in each case and in total. [7817]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Dr. Tony Wright, dated 16 January 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about complaints made to the Child Support Agency.

Since the inception of the Agency in April 1993 up to the end of November 1995, the Agency has recorded 60,826 complaints. A significant proportion of those complaints concern general child support policy or the legal powers of the Agency. Many of the complaints are from persons who are opposed to the legislation but not actually affected by it. The number of complaints specifically about the Agency's administrative performance is not separately identified, but it is considerably less than the global figure shown above. All complaints on agency administration are investigated although specific information on the number subsequently upheld is not collected.

Only a small proportion of complaints include a query about or request for financial compensation. Under our Departmental scheme a special payment will be considered where a clear unambiguous error by the Agency has resulted in an actual financial loss to the client. The attached table shows the categories under which special payments have been made, the number of payments made and the total cost of those payments.

I hope this is helpful.

Special payments made (up until 30 November 1995)

	1993–94 April—March One-off ex-gratia payments		*1994–95 April—March One-off ex-gratia payments*		*1995–96 April—March One-off ex-gratia payments*		*Continuing ex-gratia payments*		*Total ex-gratia payments*	
	Number of payments	*Total amount paid £*	*Number of payments*	*Total amount paid £*	*Number of payments*	*Total amount paid £*	*Number of payments*	*Total amount paid £*	*Total number*	*Total cost £*
Non jurisdiction	—	—	—	—	1	472.80	—	—	1	472.80
Delay in issue of MAF	—	—	1	105.91	1	939.50	—	—	2	1,045.41
Delay in issue of MEF	—	—	1	172.39	26	18,259.99	—	—	27	18,432.38
Delay in calculating MA	—	—	1	36.00	1	408.23	—	—	2	444.23
Delay in issue of DEO	—	—	—	—	1	369.33	—	—	1	369.33
Overpaid child maintenance	—	—	1	1,450.43	22	20,974.67	—	—	23	22,425.10
Restitution	—	—	—	—	1	60.80	—	—	1	60.80
Incorrect MA	—	—	1	269.90	2	592.55	5	348.40	8	1,210.85
Accounting error	—	—	4	920.12	1	258.72	—	—	5	1,178.84
Legal costs	1	100.00	1	1,000.00	3	3,490.81	—	—	5	4,590.81
Bank charges	—	—	17	490.23	5	1,686.91	—	—	22	2,177.14
Travel/post/tel costs	—	—	7	23.12	1	1.69	—	—	8	24.81

Special payments made (up until 30 November 1995)

	1993–94 April—March One-off ex-gratia payments		1994–95 April—March One-off ex-gratia payments		1995–96 April—March One-off ex-gratia payments		Continuing ex-gratia payments		Total ex-gratia payments	
	Number of payments	Total amount paid £	Number of payments	Total amount paid £	Number of payments	Total amount paid £	Number of payments	Total amount paid £	Total number	Total cost £
Misc expenses (DEO fees)	—	—	1	1.00	2	9.00	—	—	3	10.00
Breach of confidentiality	1	310.00	—	—	2	2,500.00	—	—	3	2,810.00
Worry and distress	—	—	—	—	1	1,500.00	—	—	1	1,500.00
Total	2	410.00	35	4,469.10	70	51,525.00	5	348.40	112	56,752.50

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what considerations he has given to replacing cold weather payments with an increase in income support; and if he will make a statement. [8448]

Mr. Roger Evans: Income support provides for all normal day-to-day living needs including heating. The amount of benefit is based on personal allowances paid according to age and family status and flat rate premiums for groups recognised as having special needs, such as disabled and elderly people and families. Benefit rates are reviewed each year and account is taken of all relevant factors, including any increase in the cost of fuel.

Social fund cold weather payments give extra help to vulnerable people towards heating costs from a sustained period of very cold weather. There are no plans to change the current arrangements.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a cold weather payment to everyone receiving benefit every winter, irrespective of temperature; and if he will make a statement. [8418]

Mr. Evans: The purpose of cold weather payments is to help vulnerable income support recipients with higher heating costs resulting from a sustained period of very cold weather not normally expected to occur in the majority of British winters. A reasonable indication of this is when the average temperature is, or is forecast to be 0 deg. C—freezing point—or below over seven consecutive days. To pay all people receiving benefits, many of whom may not have experienced a sustained cold spell, would not be an effective way of focusing the available resources on those most in need.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will reassess the appropriateness of the system for triggering cold weather payments, with particular reference to the distance between the weather stations and the areas in which payments are made; and if he will make a statement. [8417]

Mr. Evans: After the end of March each year, the Department reviews the effectiveness of the weather station links used during the winter, through liaison and consultation with the Meteorological Office and changes are made if necessary. Weather stations are chosen by the Meteorological Office which are considered representative of the areas they cover, and are sophisticated and reliable enough to provide the quality of data required for the scheme. We are content that the current network of 55 weather stations provides straightforward and effective national coverage which at the same time takes reasonable and practicable account of local conditions.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will consider appointing local committees to determine the payment of cold weather payments on basis of need. [8419]

Mr. Evans: No. Our aim for the social fund cold weather payment scheme is to have a simple network of weather stations that covers the whole country and allows automatic payments to be made quickly to those most in need. We achieve this by using weather stations chosen by the Meteorological Office which are considered representative of the postcode areas they cover, and are sophisticated and reliable enough to provide the quality of data required for the scheme. The current network of 55 weather stations provides straightforward and effective national coverage which at the same time takes reasonable and practicable account of local conditions. Local committees would bring inequities into a national scheme which is administered efficiently and effectively.

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the suitability of Mumbles for assessing temperatures for cold weather payments so far as the upper areas of the Aberavon constituency are concerned. [10117]

Mr. Evans: We are content that the current network of 55 weather stations used for the cold weather payment scheme, including Mumbles, provides straightforward and effective national coverage which at the same time takes reasonable and practicable account of local conditions. The effectiveness of all the weather station links used during the winter is reviewed by the Department, through liaison and consultation with the Meteorological Office, after the end of March each year when the scheme ends. If changes to the station links are considered necessary, they are put in place in time for when the scheme operates again in November.

Mr. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which stations used for assessing temperatures for the triggering of cold weather payments did not register sufficiently cold weather since 1 January 1996. [10118]

Mr. Evans: The temperatures recorded at the following weather stations used in the cold weather payment scheme have not triggered cold weather payments for a period including 1 January 1996 or later:

Aberporth

Aughton

Bedford

Birmingham airport
Boulmer
Bournemouth airport
Brize Norton
Chivenor
Cardiff (Rhoose)
Coltishall
Culdrose
Cilfynydd
Dunkeswell
Easthampstead
Gatwick airport
Heathrow airport
Hertsmonceux
Lerwick
Lyneham
Machrihanish
Manston
Marham
Mumbles
Southampton
St. Mawgan
Stanstead
Stornoway
Tiree
Valley
Wattisham
Yeovilton.

Pensioners' Incomes

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of pensioners are identified as receiving income from an occupational pension; and what is the mean and median amount received for the latest year for which figures are available. [10199]

Mr. Heald: I refer the hon. Member to table 4 of "The Pensioners' Income Series 1993", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was *(a)* the mean and *(b)* the median income of (i) single pensioners and (ii) pensioner couples before and after housing costs in the latest year for which figures are available. [10201]

Mr. Heald: I refer the hon. Member to table 1 of "The Pensioners' Income Series 1993", a copy of which is available in the Library.

War Pensions Agency

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what specific diseases or illnesses the War Pensions Agency recognises as being caused by exposure to the nerve agent Tabun during the service volunteers programme at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment when it awards pensions. [9046]

Mr. Heald: The war pensions scheme does not involve the recognition or prescription of specific diseases or illnesses.

A war pension may be awarded for any disablement which is attributable to or aggravated by service in the armed forces, including voluntary participation in any test programme at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down.

Benefits (Non-dependent Deductions)

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the savings from changes to non-dependent deduction rates since April 1994, indicating the figures on an annual cumulative basis *(a)* for 1994–95 and projected figures for *(b)* 1995–96 and *(c)* 1996–97. [9390]

Mr. Roger Evans: The savings from changes to the non-dependent deduction rates in income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit since April 1994 are estimated as *(a)* £60 million in 1994–95, *(b)* £110 million in 1995–96, and *(c)* £155 million in 1996–97 on an annual cumulative basis.

Notes:

1. Results have been estimated using data drawn from the family expenditure survey, uprated to the prices and benefit levels of each relevant policy year.
2. Expenditure is rounded to the nearest £5 million.

Housing Benefit (Easington)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many council, private and housing association tenants in the area covered by Easington district council are in receipt of housing benefit. [9501]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table.

Number of housing benefit recipients for Easington district council: May 1995

	Total	*Local authority tenants*	*Private tenants*	*Housing association tenants*
Number of recipients	12,310	10,190	960	1,170

Source:

Housing Benefit Management Information System, quarterly case load count taken at the end of May 1995.

Notes:

1. The figures have been rounded to the nearest 10.
2. The figures refer to the number of benefit units which may be a single person or a couple.
3. The total figure does not sum due to rounding.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Concessionary Television Licenses

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has in place to review concessions on television licences for people who are housebound due to disability; and if she will make a statement. [9367]

Mr. Sproat: The concessionary television licence is available to retirement pensioners and disabled people living in nursing or residential homes, or certain sheltered accommodation, provided that it meets a number of qualifying criteria and is directly comparable with a

residential home. The Government have no plans to extend the circumstances in which concessionary television licences are available.

National Lottery

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what advice her Department provided to the Director General of the National Lottery relating to his appearance before the Public Accounts Committee. [9561]

Mr. Sproat: Officials gave general advice to the director general before his appearance before the PAC on a number of occasions. For the avoidance of doubt, this advice did not include anything about the matter of G-Tech flights.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when Ministers first learned of the use of G-Tech aircraft by the Director General of the National Lottery. [9560]

Mr. Sproat: On 11 December 1995.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what discussions were held between the Director General of the National Lottery and *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in her Department on the use of G-Tech aircraft by the director general in the period 4 to 11 December 1995; and what advice the director general was given about the declaration of these flights to *(a)* the National Audit Office and *(b)* the Public Accounts Committee. [9583]

Mr. Sproat: None.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what was the cash limit on voted provision for the Office of the National Lottery in 1995–96; and what was the outturn expenditure; [8616]

(2) on what dates section 6 licences for the lottery were granted; how many applied for each licence; and what was the Director General of the National Lottery's role in the granting of these licences; [8610]

(3) in what circumstances the Director General of the National Lottery may discuss with applicants ways in which they might have restructured their applications to facilitate achieving his objectives. [8613]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* This is an operational matter for the Office of the National Lottery. I have therefore asked the Director General of the National Lottery, who is responsible for regulating the operation of the lottery, to write to the right hon. Member, placing copies of his response in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the process of selection for the Director General of the National Lottery; from how many applicants the appointment was made; on what date; and by whom. [8617]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* The director general was appointed in accordance with recruitment arrangements which met the guidance set out in the civil service management code. An open advertisement was placed in the press. A shortlist of five candidates were interviewed following advice from a personnel search company and the First Civil Service Commissioner. Mr. Peter Davis was formally appointed as director general on 25 October 1993 by the then Secretary of State for National Heritage.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she cleared all briefings related to Oflot provided by her press office to journalists in December 1995. [8681]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* There have been no briefings to journalists provided by my press office related to Oflot outside normal contact with the media.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what rules governing conduct have been laid down for the Director General of the National Lottery; and by whom and when. [8679]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* Rules governing the conduct of the Director General of the National Lottery were set out in his appointment letter and attachments signed by the then Secretary of State for National Heritage, and dated 25 October 1993.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if an estimate has been made of the cost of chartering an aircraft and crew similar to that provided by G-Tech's aircraft for a period during which that was at the service of the Director General of the National Lottery. [8615]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* No.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage on what date the Department asked the Director General of the National Lottery to attend a meeting with senior officials at the Department on Monday 18 December. [8881]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* On Friday 15 December 1995.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage on what date, in what form, by whom and to whom the Department was first informed that G-Tech had offered use of its private aircraft to the Director General of the National Lottery. [8880]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* I refer the right hon. Member to the answer he received on 10 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *253*.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage in what circumstances she can dismiss the Director General of the National Lottery *(a)* with minimum contractual notice and *(b)* summarily; and what is the minimum contracted notice. [8680]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* Paragraph 1(4) of schedule 2 to the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 provides that the Director General of the National Lottery may be removed from office on the grounds of incapacity or misbehaviour. In the absence of grounds for summary dismissal, the director general's contract may be terminated on six months' notice.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage on what date, by whom and in what way the Director General of the National Lottery was informed of her Department's advice that his flight and accommodation costs should not be borne by his hosts; and on how many occasions such advice was given. [8678]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* An internal note of an informal liaison meeting on 4 August 1994 records that the grade 3 head of the arts, sports and lottery group said that, for the proposed US trip, all due propriety should be observed and that the cost of flights and accommodation should be borne by Oflot and not its hosts. This is the only record of such advice. The note was not sent to Oflot.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to her oral answer of 20 December, *Official Report*, column *1535*, what estimate has been made, and by whom, of the saving to the taxpayer resulting from the Director General of the National Lottery's use of G-Tech aircraft; and how the sum is made up. [8614]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* I have made no estimate of the savings to public funds from use of the G-Tech aircraft by the Director General of the National Lottery.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what have been the total costs of *(a)* setting up and *(b)* running Oflot since its inception. [8911]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* This is an operational matter for the Office of the National Lottery. I have therefore asked the Director General of the National Lottery, who is responsible for regulating the operation of the lottery, to write to the hon. Member, placing copies of his response in the Libraries of the House.

Arts Council

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) when she last met the chairman or officials of the Arts Council of England to discuss the reduction in its grant in aid for 1996–97; and if she will make a statement; [9699]

(2) if she will publish figures for the cumulative change in the Arts Council for England grant in aid on an actual or estimated basis for each year from 1993–94 to 1998–99, in both cash and real terms; [9696]

(3) what representations she has received about the impact of the reduction of the Arts Council of England grant for 1996–97 on *(a)* reopened theatres, *(b)* small and medium-scale touring theatres, *(c)* regional ballet and opera companies, *(d)* regional orchestras, *(e)* dance training, *(f)* small-scale publishing and *(g)* the network of art galleries subsidised through the Arts Council and regional arts boards; [9700]

(4) if she will publish figures for the grant in aid to the Arts Council for 1993–94 to 1996–97 and estimates for 1997–98 to 1998–99, in cash terms, the annual change for each year in cash and real terms and the relative percentage changes. [9697]

Mr. Sproat: The figures requested are as follows:

Arts Council of England grant in aid

£ million

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Cash	[1]189.15	185.99	191.13	186.13	182.93	182.93
Annual cash change	—	(3.16) (1.7 per cent.)	5.14 2.8 per cent.	(5.00) (2.6 per cent.)	(3.20) (1.7 per cent.)	0.00 (0 per cent.)
1994–95 prices	192.70	185.99	186.02	176.30	169.05	165.33
Annual real terms change	—	(6.71) (3.5 per cent.)	0.03 (0 per cent.)	(9.70) (5.2 per cent.)	(7.25) (4.1 per cent.)	(3.72) (2.2 per cent.)
Cash change from 1993–94	—	(3.16) (1.7 per cent.)	1.98 1.0 per cent.	(3.02) (1.6 per cent.)	(6.22) (3.3 per cent.)	(6.22) (3.3 per cent.)
Real terms change from 1993–94	—	(6.71) (3.5 per cent.)	(6.68) (3.5 per cent.)	(16.4) 8.5 per cent.)	(23.65) (12.3 per cent.)	(27.37) (14.2 per cent.)

[1] The Arts Council of England came into being in April 1995. The sum shown for 1993–94 is that attributable to England from the grant-in-aid to the Arts Council of Great Britain.

The Secretary of State and I have received a number of representations from arts organisations and individuals about the allocation of grant in aid for the Arts Council of England which was announced last November. The Arts Council will not allocate its grant in aid to its client bodies until the council meets on 24 January. The Secretary of State has discussed these matters with the chairman of the Arts Council on a number of occasions since November.

BBC (Transmission Services)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of the present running costs of transmission services operated *(a)* by the BBC and *(b)* by companies in the private sector currently serving ITV, Channel 4 and commercial radio. [9865]

Mr. Sproat: Our consultants, led by Hill Samuel, assessed the cost of transmission to both the BBC and the commercial broadcasters.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of the effect on the charges to the BBC for its transmission services of the privatisation of those services. [9866]

Mr. Sproat: Our consultants, led by Hill Samuel, assessed the effect of privatisation on the cost to the BBC of transmission services. We have determined that the Office of Telecommunications will regulate the costs of any private sector supplier with which the BBC subsequently contracts to provide transmission services, to ensure that the cost to the corporation of its current transmission services does not increase in real terms.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if the privatisation of BBC transmission facilities will lead to separation of World Service transmitter operations from domestic operations. [9863]

Mr. Sproat: That is a matter to be determined in preparing for the privatisation.

BBC Digital Terrestrial Services

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of the BBC's development of digital terrestrial radio and television. [9864]

Mr. Sproat: The BBC is playing a crucial role in the development of digital terrestrial radio and television. It began to broadcast its five national radio services in digital form on 27 September 1995. It is working with the Independent Television Commission on detailed frequency planning for the launch of digital terrestrial television, and is an active member of the Digital Television Group, an industry body seeking to co-ordinate the technical and commercial development of digital terrestrial television.

We have offered the BBC exclusive use of the digital television multiplex which will provide the greatest geographical coverage in the UK. This gives the BBC the opportunity to be at the forefront of digital technology, and to maintain and develop its public service remit into the 21st century. It enables them to make firm plans for that multiplex, and I understand that these may include widescreen versions of BBC1 and BBC2, complemented by new services, perhaps encompassing additional news, sport and parliamentary coverage and an enhanced Ceefax service.

Windsor Castle

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is her latest estimate of the cost to public funds arising from the fire and restoration of Windsor castle. [8907]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* The current estimated cost of the Windsor castle fire restoration is £36 million, of which £10.8 million will be met from public funds.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the secretary of State for National Heritage what costs her Department and executive agencies have incurred as a result of withdrawing from contracts under which mobile phones are provided; and if he will list the companies concerned. [9748]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* The Department of National Heritage and its executive agencies have not incurred any costs as a result of withdrawing from contracts for mobile phones.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what agreements her Department and its executive agencies have with companies for the provision of mobile and car phones; and if he will list the companies having these contracts, the duration of the contracts, the number of phones covered by each agreement and the cost to public funds of each agreement. [9746]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* The Department of National Heritage and its executive agencies have agreements with Cruse Technical Services and AutoRentals for the provision of mobile phones. The Department currently has contracts with 11 air-time providers.

Provider	*Number of mobiles on line*
Mercury	4
Vodafone	25
Vodacom	9
Cellnet	14
Uniqueair	14
BT Mobile	13
Peoples Phone	2
Motorola	7
Hutchinson Telecommunications	3
Orange	1
TalkLand	4

All contracts are of one-year duration. There is no cost to public funds for any of the contracts that are currently held beyond standard rental and call charges.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what procedures were used by her Department in awarding contracts for the supply of mobile and car phones to her Department and its executive agencies; and which companies were involved in tendering for these contracts. [9747]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* All contracts for the provision of mobile phones are let according to standard Government guidelines on procurement. Quotations have been sought from a range of companies, including but not limited to: Mercury, BT Mobile, Cellnet, Vodac, London Car Telephones, Uniqueair, Peoples Phone and Vodafone.

DEFENCE

Research and Development Projects

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many research and development projects in universities are currently being funded by his Department; how much these projects are worth; and in how many universities these projects are being funded. [9042]

Mr. Arbuthnot: In 1993–94, the last year for which research expenditure figures are available, it estimated that some £33 million was spent with universities and further education establishments—table 1.5, UK Defence Statistics 1995. Currently, we have research agreements with some 70 such institutions. It is not possible to provide a detailed breakdown of the number of projects covered by these agreements without incurring disproportionate cost. Expenditure on development is mainly with industry.

RAF Finningley

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what offers for the non-military use of RAF Finningley have been received. [9859]

Mr. Soames: To date, 38 recorded expressions of interest have been received ranging from interest to individual buildings and plots of land to interest in the whole site. The details of the persons and companies involved is commercially confidential. We hope to commence full marketing of the site within the next few months.

Ballistic Missiles

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the extent of the threat posed to the United Kingdom by the development over the next decade of ballistic missile capability by countries which currently have no such capability. [10267]

Mr. Soames: We consider it unlikely that any nation aspiring towards a ballistic missile capability will be able to develop systems capable of threatening the UK mainland within the next 10 years. However, there is no room for complacency and we will continue our efforts, with others, to halt the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, and will keep the situation under careful review.

Gulf War (Costs)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the final cost of major equipment lost and munitions consumed in the Gulf war and in associated training. [8765]

Mr. Soames: The cost of major equipment lost and of munitions and minor items consumed in the Gulf conflict which were not replaced was £245 million. These costs are included in the current estimate of additional military costs of the Gulf conflict to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest estimate of the total costs arising from British involvement in the Gulf war. [8766]

Mr. Soames: The current estimate of the additional military cost of the Gulf conflict is £2.494 billion, spread over several years. The Export Credits Guarantee Department estimates that total claims arising from the Gulf conflict, including those outstanding, amount to £637 million. Other Departments incurred minor costs in respect of the conflict.

The bulk of these costs have been offset by the generous cash contributions from other Governments totalling £2.049 billion.

Low Flying

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations have been made to him concerning correlations between military low altitude flying and permanent hearing damage to children between birth and one; and if he will make a statement. [9883]

Mr. Soames: I have received no such representations.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to introduce a new minimum height limit on flight training and a maximum speed over residential areas; and if he will make a statement. [9884]

Mr. Soames: There are no plans at present to alter height and speed restrictions for low-flying military aircraft. However, the regulations governing the use of the United Kingdom low flying system are kept under continuous review.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the impacts of military low altitude flights on the health and safety of residents of the areas overflown. [10233]

Mr. Soames: We closely monitor scientific research on noise and health. With the exception of hearing, the evidence has not established a causative link between environmental noise—including that from military low flying—and health. In the case of hearing, we believe that the restrictions that we place on the heights, speeds and operating procedures of military aircraft should ensure that the level of noise experienced on the ground is not harmful, given the brief exposure involved.

We have also commissioned our own study into the feasibility of carrying out meaningful epidemiological research. This work is being conducted in co-operation with the US and Canadian Governments and a report is expected later this year. In the meantime, we believe that our current low flying operating procedures reflect the best available medical and scientific advice.

Safety is of utmost importance at all stages of our flying training programme and there are strict regulations and operating procedures in place to safeguard the general public and our aircrews. These are kept under continuous review.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide a breakdown of the spending by his Department on external advice in relation to the Scott inquiry; and how much has been spent on legal advice and for whom. [10226]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The amount so far spent by my Department on external advice in relation to Sir Richard Scott's inquiry is £215,862; this consists entirely of legal advice. This cost includes the provision of advice by the Treasury Solicitor's Department. The names of the individuals and their legal advisers are confidential to them.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has *(a)* read, collated or received and *(b)* authorised civil servants or any other persons to read, collate or receive copies of draft sections of Sir Richard Scott's report circulated by Sir Richard Scott to Ministers, civil servants and other persons. [10227]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The handling of extracts of Sir Richard Scott's draft report, subject to guidance received from the inquiry, is for those to whom they are sent. The Government do not disclose details of correspondence between the inquiry and individual witnesses.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total cost of salaries since 1992 paid to persons in his Department employed on a part-time or full-time basis in any connection in relation to the Scott inquiry. [10225]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The direct salary cost of officials within my Department wholly employed on matters relating to the Scott inquiry since 1992 is approximately £218,000. Other officials will inevitably be involved from time to time; their direct salary cost is unquantifiable.

Gulf War (Veterans' Children)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from doctors on the need for an independent inquiry into the

incidence of birth deformities among the children of Gulf war veterans; and if he will make a statement. [9928]

Mr. Soames: My Department has no record of any representations having been received from doctors on the need for an independent inquiry into the incidence of birth deformities among children of Gulf war veterans.

Mr. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will commission an independent inquiry into the incidence of birth deformities among children of Gulf war veterans; and if he will make a statement. [9929]

Mr. Soames: My Department is not aware of any established scientific or medical evidence to suggest that there is a higher incidence of birth abnormality among children of Gulf war veterans than exists in the general population. In the circumstances, there are no grounds for an independent inquiry. However, as part of its investigations into the health effects of Gulf war service, my Department is actively considering, in conjunction with civilian medical specialists recommended by the Royal College of Physicians, whether there is any further research that should be undertaken in this area.

Official Service Residences

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy in respect of official service residences. [10099]

Mr. Soames: Our policy is to implement the Cazalet report and we shall be making an announcement shortly.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what sums have been authorised for expenditure on each of the official service residences since February 1995. [10100]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is not yet held centrally. However, my Department gathers this information annually by financial year for internal reporting purposes and to provide information to the House of Commons Defence Committee. This information will be available later in the year.

SAS

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning manpower levels in the SAS. [10103]

Mr. Soames: Manning of the SAS is being maintained at a satisfactorily high level.

Royal Army Medical College

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning the future of the Royal Army medical college at Millbank, London; what functions the college currently carries out; and which college will carry out these functions in the future. [9955]

Mr. Soames: The Royal Army Medical College at Millbank provides postgraduate training in military surgery, military medicine, Army pathology, military psychiatry, preventive medicine, military entomology, general practice and the dental sciences. The future of the college is being examined on a tri-service basis, although no specific recommendations have yet been made. There will be normal consultation when firm proposals emerge.

Missiles Contract

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will place a contract for his Department's conventially armed stand-off missiles. [9956]

Mr. Arbuthnot: We expect to be in a position to place a contract in late 1996.

Land Mines (Bosnia)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate his Department has made of the number of anti-personnel land mines in Bosnia. [9957]

Mr. Soames: IFOR estimates that up to 5 million land mines, including anti-personnel mines, may have been laid in Bosnia.

Partnership for Peace

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the cost per annum to his Department of NATO's partnership for peace process. [9977]

Mr. Soames: The UK's direct contribution to the commonly funded NATO costs of the partnership for peace programme is estimated to amount to some £790,000 in 1996; the costs of UK military personnel seconded to the partnership co-ordination cell at supreme headquarters allied powers in Europe in Mons are some £200,000 annually. In addition, the UK's outreach programme of bilateral co-operation with central and eastern European countries contains many activities which are linked to, or conducted within the spirit of partnership for peace.

Ammunitions Procurement

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the countries from which Britain procures ammunition. [10101]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Apart from the United Kingdom, companies from the following countries are current suppliers of ammunition to my Department as main contactors:

France
Germany
Holland
Italy
Spain
Portugal
Greece
United States of America
Canada
Israel

RAF Coltishall

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much is being spent to replace *(a)* showers, *(b)* baths and *(c)* kitchens at RAF Coltishall; when the

decision was taken to replace these items; when they were last replaced; and if he will make a statement. [9967]

Mr. Soames: A programme is in hand for the improvement of bathrooms and kitchens in family quarters at RAF Coltishall. The cost of the work on kitchens is currently subject to tender action. The estimated cost of new showers, including necessary tiling, is £197,600 and for the replacement of baths, wash-basins, WCs, hot water cylinders and new floor covering, where such replacements are deemed necessary, £102,400. The requirement to install showers and to refurbish kitchens and bathrooms was set in January 1993. The families' quarters are of 1935 and 1955 vintage and original kitchens and bathrooms are being replaced, although some individual items have been replaced previously on a wear and tear basis.

Mr. David Hart

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 14 December, *Official Report*, column *774*, what was the purpose of each of the visits made by Mr. David Hart to United Kingdom defence companies; and what further visits to British defence companies are currently arranged for Mr. Hart. [9968]

Mr. Portillo: Mr. Hart's visits were made in his capacity as my independent adviser. There are no further visits currently planned.

Type 23 Frigates

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the total cost of each of the last 10 type 23 frigates built for his Department. [9954]

Mr. Arbuthnot: It is not our practice to publish unit production costs.

DBS Special Batteries

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contracts his Department currently has with DSB Special Batteries. [9958]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The central database maintained by the Ministry of Defence Procurement Executive shows that there are 17 contracts valued at approximately £2.4 million with DSB Special Batteries. It is possible that there may be some other work placed with the company by one of the agencies or local purchase units, but this information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Married Housing Stock

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money has been authorised for improvements to his Department's married housing stock since 28 November 1995. [9959]

Mr. Soames: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The department continues to maintain, and improve as necessary, all the housing stock for which it has a longer-term requirement.

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy in respect of the married quarters discounted sales scheme. [10033]

Mr. Soames: The Government are committed to ensuring that service personnel get a fair deal in housing terms and the MOD has a number of initiatives to encourage home ownership. Surplus married quarters are sold to service personnel at a 30 per cent. discount on the market value of the property. At the inception of the scheme, it was based on local authority right to buy schemes. Successful applicants are selected by length of service. The scheme is very popular with as many as 60 to 100 applications being received for many of the properties offered for sale. The future of the scheme is being evaluated in the context of the proposals to transfer the married quarters estate to the private sector.

Munitions Dumping

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make payments of compensation to those individuals and companies which have suffered injury and damage as a result of munitions dumped in the Irish channel found outside the sanctioned munition dumping grounds. [9927]

Mr. Soames: Any claim for compensation to my Department would be carefully considered on the basis of the facts pertaining to each case. If compensation were to be due, it would be paid in accordance with our liabilities.

Territorial Army

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for further reductions in the strength of the Territorial Army. [10104]

Mr. Soames: There are no plans to restructure the Territorial Army beyond those announced to the House on 14 July 1994, *Official Report*, columns *759-60*, and 6 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *204-06*.

Advisers

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all of his independent advisers who have made visits to British defence companies in the last 12 months. [9969]

Mr. Portillo: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my answer to him on 14 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *774*. I am not aware of any visit to British defence companies by the other three independent advisers to my predecessor.

Gulf War (Chemical Weapons)

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what reports he has received that British units serving the Gulf war were subject to chemical weapons attack; and if he will make a statement; [9965]

(2) if he will now carry out an investigation as to whether any British unit serving in the Gulf war was subject to chemical weapon attack. [9966]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) on 16 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *535*.

Aircraft Crashes

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates and types of aircraft his Department has lost through crashes in each of the last five years; what were the causes of these accidents; and what was the cost of replacement of these aircraft. [9953]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is given in the table. No replacement costs arise since there is an attrition reserve from which aircraft are taken to replace those lost.

Date	*Aircraft type*	*Cause*
1991		
8 January	Phantom FGR2	Aircrew error
10 January	Gazelle AH1	Aircrew error
13 January	Tornado GR1	Aircrew error
16 January	Gazelle HT2	Human factors (non-aircrew)
20 January	Tornado GR1	Not positively determined
19 February	Scout AH1	Aircrew error
18 March	Canberra T4	Aircrew error
10 May	Sea Harrier FRS1	Not positively determined
10 May	Tornado GR1	Aircrew error
29 May	Harrier GR7	Technical fault
1 June	Sea King HAS5	Aircrew error
3 June	Gazelle AH1	Aircrew error
8 August	Puma HC1	Not positively determined
29 August	Jaguar T2A	Operating hazard
10 September	Sea King HAS6	Human factors (non-aircrew)
12 September	Tornado GR1	Not positively determined
25 September	Harrier T4A	Natural hazard
30 October	Phantom FGR2	Not positively determined
9 November	Vigilant	Technical fault
14 November	Lynx AH7	Aircrew error
1992		
14 February	Hunter T8C	Technical fault
12 May	Tucano T1	Aircrew error
12 May	Lynx AH7	Aircrew error
14 May	Harrier GR3	Operating hazard
28 May	Sea Harrier FRS1	Not positively determined
30 May	Viking	Natural hazard
9 July	Buccaneer S2B	Technical fault
9 July	Viking	Aircrew error
7 August	Harrier GR5	Technical fault
30 September	Hawk T1A	Aircrew error
16 October	Bulldog T1	Not positively determined
21 October	Sea King HC4	Aircrew error
26 November	Puma HC1 and Gazelle AH1	Operating hazard
1993		
18 March	Gazelle	Human factors (non-aircrew)
19 May	Chipmunk T10	Aircrew error
27 May	Hercules C3	Not positively determined
28 June	Harrier GR7	Natural hazard
1 July	Hawk T1	Aircrew error
20 July	Gazelle AH1	Aircrew error
12 August	Wessex HC2	Technical fault
26 August	Chipmunk T10	Aircrew error
9 September	Gazelle HT3	Aircrew error
17 September	Wessex HC2	Natural hazard
21 October	Tornado F3	Aircrew error
6 November	Sea King HAS6	Technical fault
23 November	Harrier GR7	Technical fault
1994		
6 January	Sea Harrier FA2	Human factors (non-aircrew)
14 January	Harrier GR7	Aircrew error
25 March	Lynx HAS3	Aircrew error
10 April	Lynx AH7	Aircrew error
2 June	Chinook HC2	Aircrew error
7 June	Tornado F3	Technical fault
8 July	Tornado F3	Aircrew error
19 July	Tornado GR1	Technical fault
1 August	Tornado GR1	Under investigation
1 September	Tornado GR1A	Not positively determined
19 September	Tornado GR1A	Technical fault
22 September	Lynx AH7	Technical fault
11 November	Gazelle AH1	Aircrew error
15 December	Sea Harrier FRS1	Technical fault
1995		
10 March	Tornado F3	Under investigation
16 May	Nimrod R1	Under investigation
1 June	Harrier GR7	Under investigation
21 June	Jaguar GR1A	Under investigation
5 August	Viking	Under investigation
10 August	Hawk T1W	Under investigation
20 August	Lynx AH7	Under investigation
27 August	Viking	Aircrew error
2 September	Nimrod MR2	Under investigation
5 October	Gazelle HT2	Under investigation
30 October	2 x Tornado F3	Under investigation
1996		
10 January	2 x Tornado F3	Under investigation
11 January	Tornado GR1	Under investigation

Vehicle Procurement

Sir Anthony Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are his plans for the procurement of new utility vehicles and ambulances for the British Army; and if he will make a statement. [10825]

Mr. Arbuthnot: There is a pressing need to replace about half the current fleet of Land Rover utility vehicles, many of which have reached the end of their operational lives. Subject to the satisfactory completion of contractual negotiations, we propose to place an order with Land Rover for about 8,000 new vehicles, known commercially as "Defender XD", to meet the Army's light and medium utility truck requirement. We also intend to place an order for 65 additional Pinzgauer vehicles, supplied by Steyr Daimler Puch, to enhance the fleet of these vehicles which is already successfully in service to meet the Army's heavy duty medium truck requirement.

The Army and Royal Marines also need to replace their aging battlefield ambulances with vehicles providing better conditions for casualties, improved medical facilities and greater reliability. The competition for this programme has been particularly close, with vehicles offered by Land Rover and Steyr Daimler Puch both meeting the operational requirement. Both vehicles demonstrated excellent technical qualities. The Land Rover however, provides, in particular, excellent working conditions for the medical crew and commonality both with the new utility vehicles and the in-service Land Rover fleet. Also its acquisition cost is lower than the Steyr. We have, therefore, decided to award the contract for the supply of about 800 ambulances to Land Rover, subject to the satisfactory conclusion of contract negotiations.

These decisions are good news for the armed forces. Both of the new Land Rover vehicles will enter service

this summer and will be available for operational deployment in support of IFOR.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of state for Defence if he will make a statement about the procurement of military ambulances. [10484]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave this afternoon to my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire (Sir A. Grant).

Mr. Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when a decision will be taken on the winner of the contract for the provision of non-operational B vehicles to the British forces in Germany. [10735]

Mr. Arbuthnot: We have decided to award the contract for the provision of non-operational B-vehicles to the British Forces in Germany to Ryder plc with its sub-contractor PHH plc, subject to a successful conclusion of contractual negotiations.

The award of this contract follows a rigorous competition involving a number of German companies as well as Ryder plc. The competition was run under European Union restricted procedures for public contracts. We decided that the Ryder plc bid offered a high standard of technical and commercial confidence and the best value for money to the British forces in Germany and to the taxpayer.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he has *(a)* read or received and *(b)* authorised civil servants or any other persons to collate or receive copies of draft sections of Sir Richard Scott's report circulated by Sir Richard Scott to Ministers, civil servants and other persons. [10218]

Mr. Freeman: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister today.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what is the total cost of salaries since 1992 paid to persons in the Deputy Prime Minister's Office and the Office of Public Service employed on a part-time or full-time basis in any connection in relation to the Scott inquiry. [10217]

Mr. Freeman: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the reply given to the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary on 8 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *861*.

Civil Servants (Industry Links)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) how many serving civil servants are involved in the scheme to improve links with industry; [8761]

(2) how many serving civil servants involved in the scheme to improve links with industry are acting as non-executive directors; which companies are involved; and to what extent civil servants acting as non-executive directors receive payments from the companies concerned. [8762]

Mr. Willetts: There are several different interchange schemes with industry and commerce, including secondments, short-term attachments, non-executive opportunities and joint training programmes. In 1995, over 600 civil servants participated in these schemes.

In 1995, 57 civil servants held non-executive appointments within private sector companies. The companies involved are as follows:

AEA Technology
Albert Fisher
Amec
Anglian Water
Avery
British Approvals Board for Telecoms
BOC, UK Gases Ltd.
BTR Industries Ltd.
Cadbury
Coats Viyella
Dalgety
European Transonic Windtunnel
Forward Trust Group
Glynwed Plastics
Glynwed Consumer Products
Great Easterhouse Development Co. Ltd.
Hanson
HR Wallingford
IBM
JC Bamford
KPMG
Laings
Lloyds Register Quality Assurance Ltd.
Marks and Spencer
Mott MacDonald
Moray Firth Maltings
Optimat
OGWR Partnership Trust plc
P and O European Transport Services
Rank Cintel
Rank Organisation
Redland Roof Tiles
RHM
Royal Bank of Scotland
RTZ Borax
Save and Prosper
Scottish Design
Seven Seas
Stirling Fibre
Strathclyde Greenbelt Company
Tarmac
Thorn Security
Three Towns Initiative Co. Ltd.
TSB Scotland
United Distillers
Vickers
The Wise Group
Westerhailes Partnership Co. Ltd.
Woods of Colchester Ltd. (GEC)

In no cases do individuals receive payment, although some companies pay a small amount to the employing Department.

Deregulation

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list those European capitals he has *(a)* visited and *(b)* plans to visit to discuss deregulation and give the total estimated cost to public funds of these visits. [5877]

Mr. Freeman *[pursuant to his reply, 14 December 1995, c. 749]:* I regret that the figure quoted as the estimated travel costs associated with the visits already undertaken is incorrect. The correct information is:

"The travel costs associated with the visits already undertaken is estimated to be £12,898."

WALES

Newspaper Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the expenditure of his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental

public bodies on newspaper advertising by title for each year since 1990–91; and what estimate he has made for 1995–96 based on expenditure to date and existing plans. [6574]

Mr. Hague: The information is not collected in the format requested. Expenditure on press advertising for my Department and its executive agency, Cadw, since 1990 is set out in the following table. Figures are not held centrally for NDPBs.

£ thousands

Year	*Welsh Office*	*CADW*[1]
1990–91	251	n/a
1991–92	341	[2]n/a
1992–93	350	34
1993–94	269	58
1994–95	247	35
1995–96	394	26

[1] Cadw was set up as an executive agency in April 1991.
[2] Figures are not readily available and can be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

School Milk

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide figures for the consumption of milk under the European Union school milk scheme for each of the last five years in both primary and secondary schools in Wales; and if he will make a statement on the projected effect on school milk consumption in Wales of the Government's planned cut in subsidy for the provision of milk in schools, and its net effect on the Welsh Office budget after taking into account any loss of European Union subsidy. [8464]

Mr. Hague: The total milk consumption in primary and secondary schools in Wales—including for catering—funded by the scheme was as follows:

Academic year	*Litres (millions)*
1990–91	3.7
1991–92	3.9
1992–93	4.0
1993–94	3.2
1994–95	2.9

As the funds to local authorities are provided by the intervention board executive agency, there will be no effect on the Welsh Office budget.

Play Groups

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many pre-school play groups there are in each of the counties of Wales. [9331]

Mr. Richards: The latest available figures provided by Wales PPA are for 1994–95. They are taken from the annual report 1994–95, and are as follows:

	Number
Clwyd	81
Dyfed	45
Mid Glamorgan	83
South Glamorgan	93
West Glamorgan	25
Gwent	74
Gwynedd	27
Powys	38
Wales	466

These do not include combined parent and toddler play groups.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the amount of part-time and full-time employment generated by the play group movement. [9328]

Mr. Richards: This information is not held centrally.

Long-stay Hospitals

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people suffering from *(a)* mental handicap and *(b)* mental illness, are currently being cared for in long-stay hospitals in Wales; what is Welsh Office policy for providing aid in the community for the residents of each of the long-stay hospitals; and what is the target date for each hospital for ending the current mode of care for patients. [9337]

Mr. Hague: Numbers of residents in *(a)* mental handicap and *(b)* mental illness long stay hospitals at 31 March 1994—latest available validated statistical data—are given in the following table. These figures exclude those hospitals that were open as at 31 March 1994 but have subsequently closed.

The mental illness strategy aims to promote the development of a multi-agency approach to the delivery of services, with a range of mental health care within community settings supported by appropriate hospital and residential care. The mental handicap strategy promotes care within the community with additional help and support as appropriate. The resettlement of individuals should take place only after a full multi-agency assessment. Hospitals will be closed only when appropriate alternative provision is in place and when local approval has been reached.

Local approval has been agreed for the closure of Talgarth, Powys (1997), Hensol, Mid Glamorgan (1999) and Llanfrechfa Grange, Gwent (1997). The remaining hospitals do not yet have an agreed closure date.

	March 31 1994
Mental handicap resident patients	
Bryn-y-Neuadd	159
Hensol	244
Ystrad Mynach Bungalow Units	18
Ely	207
Llanfrechfa Grange	92
Bronllys	30
Brynhyfryd	33
Llys Maldwyn	41
Other hospitals	103
Wales total[1]	927

	March 31 1994
Mental illness resident patients	
Cefn Coed Hospital, West Glamorgan	251
Whitchurch Hospital, South Glamorgan	299
Pen-y-Fal Hospital, Gwent	191
Talgarth Hospital, Powys	139
St. Cadoc's Hospital, Gwent[2]	198
St. David's Hospital, Dyfed	204
Other hospitals	1,145
Wales total[1]	2,427

[1] Excluding residents in hospitals that have closed since 31 March 1994.

[2] Figures for St. Cadoc's include old age psychiatry beds at St. Woolos.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people with learning difficulties there are in long-stay hospitals in each of the health authority areas in Wales at the latest date for which information is available; what were the corresponding figures five and 10 years ago; and what he forecasts the figure will be in 12 months and two years time. [9960]

Mr. Hague: The information requested is as follows.

Patients resident in hospitals for people with learning disabilities

	[1]1985	[1]1989	[2]1994
Clwyd	74	52	15
Dyfed	83	45	49
Gwent	383	286	93
Gwynedd	272	253	159
Mid Glamorgan	461	388	268
Powys	191	152	104
South Glamorgan	375	324	207
West Glamorgan	106	55	32
Wales	1,945	1,555	927

[1] At 5 April.

[2] At 31 March.

No forecasts of the number of residents in hospitals have been made by the Welsh Office.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what policies he has to assist special needs children into pre-school education. [9330]

Mr. Richards: Local education authorities have the responsibility of making appropriate provision for a child under five who has been identified as having special educational needs. The code of practice on the identification and assessment of special educational needs gives guidance on special education provision for the under fives. Our proposed voucher scheme will apply to all four-year-olds, including those with special needs.

Autism

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the services available to *(a)* children and *(b)* adults with autism; and what plans he has to enhance these services. [9255]

Mr. Richards: Health and local authorities are responsible for identifying individuals with autism and for the provision of appropriate services.

As part of a project to promote the development of services to people with autism in Wales, the National Autistic Society has recently completed an audit of autism-focused services in Wales. This project is supported by the Welsh Office, through the Welsh mental handicap strategy. We have considered the society's findings and have suggested that they be made available to health and unitary authorities.

Ofsted Inspectors

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many Ofsted inspectors have *(a)* early years teaching qualifications and *(b)* early years teaching experience; and if he will make a statement. [9553]

Mr. Richards: Operational issues relating to the work and organisation of the Office for Standards in Education are matters for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in England. By agreement with the hon. Member these questions have been referred to Mr. Woodhead.

Housing

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what grants are currently available for the conversion into dwelling houses of shops which are no longer financially viable; and if he will make a statement. [9870]

Mr. Hague: District councils may give discretionary home renovation grants to convert buildings, including shops, into dwellings. Over the past five years we have made available £20.5 million which has created more than 1,300 such dwellings. For 1996–97 councils can support such grants from the £179.6 million I have made available to them for home renovation.

Llangollen International Eisteddfod

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will support the nomination of the Llangollen international eisteddfod for the Nobel peace prize in its jubilee year; and if he will make a statement. [9871]

Mr. Hague: The Nobel committee does not reveal the identities of candidates for the peace prize. These only become known if nominators make their proposals known and I am not aware that the Llangollen international Eisteddfod has been nominated. The Nobel committee has made it clear that supporting candidates serves no purpose and could even be interpreted as an attempt unfairly to influence the committee.

Chester-Holyhead Rail Line (Electrification)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) by what date the electrification of the railway line between (1) Chester and Holyhead is planned to be completed; and if he will make a statement; [9872]

(2) if he will make a statement concerning plans for the electrification of the railway between Chester and Holyhead. [9873]

Mr. Hague: The need, timing and method of improving the rail infrastructure is primarily a matter for Railtrack plc and its customers, the train operators. However, I understand there are currently no plans for the electrification of the railway line between Chester and Holyhead, but that other forms of upgrading the line are under review.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what European Community funding is available to assist the electrification of the Chester to Holyhead railway line; and if he will make a statement. [9885]

Mr. Hague: Should they decide to electrify the line Railtrack would be eligible to apply for assistance towards capital expenditure from the trans European network fund and the European Investment Bank. Loan guarantees might also be available from the European investment fund.

Teachers (Employment Costs)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms the total employment costs of teachers in each local education authority from 1990–91 to 1995–96 and the average cost of employing a teacher in (i) cash and (ii) real terms in each of these years. [10279]

Mr. Richards: Total expenditure on teachers' salaries in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools in each local education authority from 1990–91 to 1993–94 is given in the following table. This includes home teaching and individual teaching at other establishments, for example, hospitals and special units offered by social services. Information is not yet available for 1994–95 or 1995–96.

£000

	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94
Cash				
Clwyd	70,908	79,532	89,764	81,224
Dyfed	67,273	75,171	83,976	84,433
Gwent	77,978	78,954	85,859	89,638
Gwynedd	42,785	47,478	52,605	52,794
Mid Glamorgan	100,579	113,235	125,781	127,394
Powys	21,432	24,585	27,645	28,120
South Glamorgan	69,419	78,972	86,260	84,343
West Glamorgan	67,067	72,835	79,423	79,906
Total Wales	517,441	570,762	631,313	627,852
Constant 1994–95 prices				
Clwyd	82,202	86,782	94,117	82,748
Dyfed	77,988	82,023	88,048	86,017
Gwent	90,398	86,151	90,023	91,320
Gwynedd	49,599	51,806	55,156	53,785
Mid Glamorgan	116,598	123,557	131,880	129,785
Powys	24,846	26,826	28,986	28,648
South Glamorgan	80,476	86,171	90,443	85,926
West Glamorgan	77,749	79,474	83,274	81,405
Total Wales	599,855	622,790	661,927	639,634

Source:

Revenue Outturn Returns.

The average cost of employing a teacher in maintained nursery, primary, secondary, and special schools as at March of each of the years 1991 to 1994 was as follows:

	1991 £	1992 £	1993 £	[1]1994 £
Cash	19,551	21,918	23,658	24,004
Constant 1994–95 prices	22,665	23,916	24,805	24,454

Source:

Database of Teacher Records.

Note:

[1] Latest available.

Training

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms the training budget each year since it became a Welsh Office responsibility; how much in each year in (i) cash and (ii) real terms was directed to the training of young people; and what percentage of this budget is allocated to the training and enterprise councils. [10285]

Mr. Richards: The information requested is contained in the following tables.

Employment and training budget

	Cash	Real terms
1992–93[1]	151.9	151.9
1993–94[1]	144.7	140.6
1994–95[2]	147.4	140.6
1995–96[3]	148.7	138.0

[1] Departmental report 1995, outturn.
[2] Appropriation account 1994–95, outturn.
[3] Departmental report 1995, provision.

Youth programmes

	Cash	Real terms
1992–93[1]	42.7	42.7
1993–94[1]	40.4	39.3
1994–95[2]	39.4	37.6
1995–96[3]	48.5	45.0

[1] Departmental report 1995, outturn.
[2] Appropriation account 1994–95, outturn.
[3] Departmental report 1995, provision.

TEC youth programme budgets (as a percentage of total youth programme budgets above)

	Per cent.
1992–93	97
1993–94	99

TEC youth programme budgets (as a percentage of total youth programme budgets above)

	Per cent.
1994–95	99
1995–96	96

The balance of funding on this programme relates to expenditure that is borne centrally on youth bridging allowances and on the youth training follow-up survey.

Business Rate

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the impact of the uniform business rate on the occupancy of commercial premises in Llanfair Caereinion. [9879]

Mr. Hague: Business rate is only one of a number of factors which may affect the occupancy of commercial premises. Since the introduction of the 1995 rating list, numbers of empty properties, as indicated by empty property rate relief, have remained stable in Llanfair Caereinion.

Bryn-y-Neuadd Long-stay Hospital

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current annual cost of running Bryn-y-Neuadd long-stay hospital at Llanfairfechan; and what was the corresponding cost, in 1996 prices, five and 10 years ago. [9961]

Mr. Hague: Details of individual hospital expenditure has not been available centrally since 1990–91. The annual cost of running Bryn-y-Neuadd long-stay hospital for 1990–91 and 1985–86 at 1996–97 prices was £6.653 million and £5.840 million respectively.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many residents there are at present in the Bryn-y-Neuadd long-stay hospital at Llanfairfechan; what was the corresponding number five and 10 years ago; and what he forecasts the number will be in 12 months and two years time. [9962]

Mr. Hague: The information requested is as follows:

Patients resident in Bryn-y-Neuadd hospital

	Learning disability	Mental illness
1985[1]	234	0
1989[1]	223	0
1994[2]	159	23

[1] At 5 April.
[2] At 31 March.

No forecasts of the number of residents in hospitals have been made by the Welsh Office.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what date it was planned, in the context of the all-Wales strategy for mentally handicapped adults and children of 1983, that Bryn-y-Neuadd hospital at Llanfairfechan, would be phased out of its role as a long-stay hospital for people with learning difficulties; what plans he has to continue to pursue that objective; and what is the new revised target date for achieving their objective. [9963]

Mr. Hague: No date for closure has been agreed and no formal consultation has taken place. Additional Welsh Office funds have been agreed for 1997–98 and 1998–99 which will provide support for a phased process of resettlement which will enable over 500 people to move from long-stay institutions into more appropriate forms of alternative care. Resettlement from Bryn-y-Neuadd will commence when resources become available. The possibility of providing additional funding will be reviewed in three years time.

Tai Cymru

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms the amount of money made available for Tai Cymru in each year from 1990–91 to 1996–97 and the number of houses which (i) his Department estimated would be built and (ii) were built in each year up to 1994–95. [10042]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The available information on the capital programme is as follows:

	1990–91		1991–92		1992–93		1993–94		1994–95		1995–96
	Plans	Outturn	Plans	Outturn	Plans	Outturn	Plans	Outturn	Plans	Forecast outturn	Plans
Net capital expenditure:											
Cash terms	92.2	92.2	106.4	107.4	115.5	[1]151.7	122	122.1	111.9	111.9	93.5
Real terms[2]	106.9	106.9	116.1	117.2	121.1	159.1	124.3	124.4	111.9	111.9	91.0
Units started	n/a	3,660	3,900	4,439	4,000	4,340	4,000	4,318	4,000	3,900	3,500
Units completed	[3]3,000	3,060	3,500	3,548	4,000	[4]5,274	4,050	4,408	4,000	4,180	3,550

n/a - not available.
[1] Includes £35 million allocated by the Secretary of State under the acquisition initiative.
[2] Constant 1994–95 prices.
[3] Includes 900 rehabilitation.
[4] Includes 1,198 purchased under the acquisition initiative.

For 1996–97 I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the House on Wednesday 13 December, *Official Report*, columns *1002-7.*

Local Government Finance

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the level of total standard spending in *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97 excluding amounts made available to police authorities. [10034]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The amount of total standard spending in Wales, excluding that made available to the police authorities, is £2,466,247,000 in 1995–96 and £2,535,937,000 in the provisional 1996–97 settlement.

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms the revenue support grant for local authorities in each of the years from 1990–91 to 1996–97. [10036]

Mr. Jones: The information requested is given in the following table.

Revenue support grant for Welsh local authorities (including police authorities)

all amounts in £ million

Year	*Cash*	*at 1990–91 prices*
1990–91	1,139.9	1,139.9
1991–92	1,235.3	1,162.7
1992–93	1,619.5	1,464.8
1993–94	1,668.2	1,466.0
1994–95	1,738.9	1,500.0
1995–96	1,717.0	1,441.5
1996–97[1]	1,790.4	1,462.9

[1] Provisional.

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of *(a)* the maximum council tax increase each local authority will be able to make in 1996–97 while respecting his capping criteria and *(b)* the levels of local authority spending in (i) 1995–96 and (ii) 1996–97 allowing for statutory increases. [10040]

Mr. Jones: Council tax increases consistent with my right hon. Friend's proposed capping principles will depend on his final settlement proposals. These will be announced at the end of this month. The latest available estimate of local authority net revenue spending for 1995–96 is £2,883.9 million. Local authorities have yet to set their budgets for 1996–97.

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the *(a)* level of additional funding for education in Wales provided by the revenue support grant for 1996–97 and *(b)* the additional funding made available for education in England. [10278]

Mr. Richards: My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget statement on 28 November allowed for planned public spending on schools in England in 1996–97 to rise by £878 million, of which £774 million is being channelled through the local government revenue settlement. Comparable resources for Wales were included in the £85 million increase in total standard spending announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales on 28 November.

With the agreement of the Welsh local authority associations, and with the exception of community care resources, the Government do not identify funding for local government in Wales in respect of particular services.

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms the amount made available for local authority capital provision for housing in each year from 1990–91 to 1996–97. [10041]

Mr. Jones: The information requested is given in the following table.

Local authority housing capital provision[1]

£ million

	Cash prices	*Constant 1994–95 prices*
1990–91	190.3	220.6
1991–92	194.3	212.0
1992–93	279.4	292.9
1993–94	263.9	268.9
1994–95	265.7	265.7
1995–96	267.6	260.4
1996–97	258.1	244.5

[1] Government provision announced prior to the start of each financial year.

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms the amounts made available to local authorities for housing renovation grants in each year from 1990–91 to 1996–97, the estimates made at the time of the number of grants which would be awarded and the number which were so awarded in each year from 1990–91 to 1996–97. [10043]

Mr. Jones: The information is given in the following tables:

Table 1: Government finance made available

£ million

Year	*Cash prices*	*Constant 1994–95 prices*
1990–91	95.3	110.5
1991–92	[1]109.7	[1]119.7
1992–93	169.3	177.5
1993–94	171.9	175.1
1994–95	[2]184.0	[2]184.0
1995–96	179.1	174.3
1996–97	179.6	170.1

[1] Includes £5.9 million for Exchequer contributions for 1991–92.

[2] Includes an extra £7 million made available during the year.

Table 2: Numbers of completed grants

	Plans	*Outturn*
1990–91	23,500	28,288
1991–92	9,989	19,663
1992–93	20,300	15,802
1993–94	23,100	16,152
1994–95	17,700	15,061
1995–96	16,400	[1]16,300
1996–97	17,000	n/a

[1] Estimated.

n/a = not available.

The numbers of grants completed in 1990–91 and 1991–92 include a significant number approved under the Housing Act 1985. Different grant arrangements were brought into effect from 1 July 1990 under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. All figures include disabled facilities grants.

Figures given for plans made assumptions about the mix of types of grant to be awarded and the associated average costs: no targets by type were set for authorities.

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he made of the cost of the teachers' pay award for *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97 when calculating the revenue support grant; and what are those costs for 1995–96. [10284]

Mr. Richards: We expect pay awards in the public sector, including those subject to the recommendations of the School Teachers' Review Body, to be met through increased efficiency and other economies. The local government revenue settlements for 1995–96 and 1996–97 reflect that policy.

During the 1996–97 settlement discussion, the Welsh local authority associations estimated the cost of the 1995–96 pay award at £19 million.

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of local government spending was made up by the revenue support grant in each year since 1990–91. [10035]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The following table shows, from 1990–91 to 1995–96, revenue support grant as a percentage of the total expenditure on services to which revenue support grant may apply. The expenditure figures used were obtained from local authorities' outturn information for years up to 1993–94 and from information on budgets for 1994–95 and 1995–95.

Revenue support grant as a percentage of spending

	Per cent.
1990–91	51
1991–92	50
1992–93	61
1993–94	64
1994–95	62
1995–96	58

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms (i) the total amounts and (ii) the amounts per pupil that each local education authority was permitted to borrow for capital work on schools in each local government financial settlement from 1990–91 to 1996–97. [10037]

Mr. Richards: Most of the borrowing by local education authorities to fund capital work on schools since 1990–91 has been covered by unhypothecated basic credit approvals. Accordingly each authority decides how much of its approved borrowing is allocated to schools.

Public Bodies (Funding)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms the revenue provision in each year from 1990–91 to 1996–97 for *(a)* the National Museum of Wales, *(b)* the National Library of Wales, *(c)* CADW, *(d)* the Arts Council of Wales, *(e)* the Sports Council for Wales, *(f)* the Countryside Council for Wales and *(g)* the Wales tourist board. [10044]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information is as follows:

£ millions

	1990–91 outturn	*1991–92 outturn*	*1992–93 outturn*	*1993–94 outturn*	*1994–95 outturn*	*1995–96 forecast outturn*	*1996–97 plans*
National Museum of Wales							
a) cash	8.4	9.5	10.5	11.4	11.5	11.6	11.6
b) real terms	9.8	10.4	11.0	11.6	11.5	11.3	10.9
National Library of Wales							
a) cash	3.8	4.3	4.8	4.9	4.9	5.1	5.4
b) real terms	4.4	4.7	5.0	5.0	4.9	4.9	5.1
CADW							
a) cash	9.1	9.7	9.2	9.9	10.8	10.5	10.0
b) real terms	10.5	10.6	9.7	10.1	10.8	10.2	9.4
Arts Council of Wales							
a) cash	—	—	—	—	13.7	14.2	14.2
b) real terms	—	—	—	—	13.7	13.8	13.4
Sports Council for Wales							
a) cash	4.0	4.3	5.2	5.1	5.7	5.8	5.8
b) real terms	4.6	4.6	5.5	5.2	5.7	5.6	5.5
Countryside Council for Wales							
a) cash	0.5	14.5	16.0	18.2	20.5	18.3	21.6
b) real terms	0.5	15.8	16.8	18.5	20.5	17.8	20.4
Wales Tourist Board							
a) cash	7.2	7.6	10.0	9.7	10.6	11.7	11.7
b) real terms	8.4	8.3	10.5	9.9	10.6	11.4	11.1

The real terms figures have been derived by the application of the latest GDP deflator at market prices with a base year of 1994–95.

SCOTLAND

Powered Wheelchairs

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what consultations he has had with health authorities concerning the funding of indoor/outdoor powered wheelchairs in Scotland; [8626]

(2) what consultations he has had with user groups concerning the funding of indoor/outdoor powered wheelchairs in Scotland over the last 12 months. [8627]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The national services division of the Common Services Agency which is responsible for centrally purchased services set up a working group in early 1995 to look at the future provision of artificial limb and appliance services, which includes the wheelchair service. The working group was made up of representatives from trusts, health boards and all artificial limb and appliance centres; from training, therapy, supplies and primary care interests; a consumer sub-group and a consultation network. It concluded that funding for ALAC services should be devolved to health boards, a recommendation I have approved.

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the criteria for qualifying for a publicly funded indoor/outdoor powered wheelchair in Scotland. [8628]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Patients must meet the following criteria:

1. for medical reasons, be severely and permanently restricted in mobility;
2. be unable to walk;
3. be unable to propel a manual wheelchair;
4. have no problems with visual, cognitive, visuo-spatial or other higher cortical functions or other medical conditions, which would make them a danger to themselves, pedestrians or other road users;
5. have the ability to comply with the DVLC requirements for motor vehicle drivers concerning epilepsy and other causes of loss of consciousness;
6. have visual acuity of at least 6/24 (can read a car number plate at 40 ft) and have a field of vision of 120° in a horizontal plane and 20° above and below this plane (equivalent to class 3 vehicle visual standards);
7. have demonstrated in a driving test and by other means that they have the insight, intellectual capacity and dexterity to operate an electrically powered indoor/outdoor chair (EPIOC) safely and responsibly on their own and without assistance;
8. have a residential environment which is compatible with the use of an EPIOC, and which includes a storage area with a power supply for a battery charger;
9. have a local outside environment which is accessible by an EPIOC and compatible with its use;
10. be able to ensure that an EPIOC will be maintained adequately either personally or by a carer;
11. have the capacity to derive significant improvement in their independence and quality of life through use of an EPIOC.

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of indoor/outdoor powered wheelchairs provided by health authorities in Scotland. [8630]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on the overall number of powered chairs issued in the last five years is not held centrally. Details of the number of indoor/outdoor powered chairs and indoor powered chairs purchases since the provision of special funding in 1992 are as follows:

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Indoor/Outdoor	313	267	286	[1]93
Indoor	—	[2]497	409	[1]87

[1] For 6 months 1 April 1995-30 September 1995.
[2] For the 24 month period 1 April 1992-31 March 1994.

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what funding arrangements exist for indoor/outdoor powered wheelchair provision in Scotland; [8631]

(2) what plans he has to continue to honour the Government's obligation to maintain the funding of indoor/outdoor powered wheelchairs in Scotland. [8629]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It was announced in February 1992 that special funding of £2.5 million would be made available in Scotland over the following three years for the provision of indoor/outdoor powered wheelchairs.

Funding has since been renewed and will be included in the funding of artificial limb and appliance centres which is being returned to health boards in 1996–97 through the weighted capitation formula. Notification of the notional allocation for each board was included in the financial allocations for 1996–97.

Fatal Accident Inquiry

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will ensure the early publication of the fatal accident inquiry report, arising from the hearing in Dingwall, Ross-shire from 20 to 24 March 1995 over the death of Dr. Katherine Margaret Herd; and if he will make a statement. [8642]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Responsibility for this report rests with the sheriff principal of Grampian, Highland and Islands. I understand that his findings will be published on Thursday 18 January 1996.

House Standards

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many houses were classified as below the tolerable standard in (i) Scotland and (ii) each of the district council areas in the last year for which figures are available. [9857]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: This information is published in the Scottish Office housing statistical bulletin HSG/1994/8, "Dwellings below the Tolerable Standard in Scotland: Estimates by Local Authorities for March 1994 and details of action on such dwellings". A copy of the bulletin has been placed in the Library.

Housing Action Areas

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each district and islands council area each year from 1987–88 to 1994–95, how many *(a)* housing action areas for improvement and *(b)* housing action areas for improvement and demolition have been declared. [10107]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The information for those district councils which have declared either kind of housing action area is set out in the tables.

(a) Housing action areas declared for improvement

Authority	*1987–88*	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Aberdeen	1	—	3	7	—	—	—	—
Argyll and Bute	20	5	1	2	—	—	—	—
Clydebank	—	3	1	1	1	—	—	—
Clydesdale	2	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cunninghame	4	6	—	7	3	3	5	9
Dundee	16	2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Edinburgh	28	4	—	17	—	—	1	2
Ettrick and Lauderdale	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Glasgow	21	17	2	8	5	4	—	1
Hamilton	1	3	—	—	1	—	1	1
Inverclyde	4	—	—	—	3	—	9	—
Inverness	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	—
Kirkcaldy	3	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Monklands	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Motherwell	2	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Renfrew	15	2	—	1	—	5	1	7
Strathkelvin	1	1	2	1	—	1	—	2
Tweeddale	2	—	—	—	—	1	—	—

(a) Housing action areas for demolition and improvement

Authority	*1987–88*	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Argyll and Bute	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cunninghame	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dundee	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Housing Association Grant

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what average levels of housing association grant he has assumed for Scottish Homes development programme for 1996–97 for *(a)* the total housing association and co-operative programme and *(b)* the housing association and co-operative programme for rent. [10108]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Scottish Homes is currently drawing up proposals for its development programme in 1996–97, based on its public expenditure settlement, and I expect to consider its proposals next month. The average level of housing association grants will be set in the light of the approved programme and the associated performance targets. I shall be looking to Scottish Homes to improve on the current year's target of 60 per cent. leverage across its programme as a whole.

Scottish Charities Office

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current staffing establishment of the Scottish Charities Office; and what assessment he has made as to whether the office has sufficient resources to enable it to investigate allegations of irregularities within a reasonable time. [10231]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Charities Office, which is a division of the Crown Office, is permanently staffed by two solicitors, two investigators and one administrative officer. It has access to the services of a chartered accountant on a consultative basis and to general support services within the Crown Office. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate is satisfied that it has sufficient resources to deal with its current workload.

Right to Buy

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each year since 1980–81 the total value of discounts to public sector tenants in Scotland exercising their right to buy. [10109]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The total value of the discounts, being the difference between the assessed market value and the purchase price paid, is set out in the table.

Value of discounts to public sector tenants in Scotland exercising their right to buy

1980–81: £37.6 million
1981–82: £73.3 million
1982–83: £104.5 million
1983–84: £130.8 million
1984–85: £137.9 million
1985–86: £130.7 million

1986–87: £147.5 million
1987–88: £262.9 million
1988–89: £430.7 million
1989–90: £521.6 million
1990–91: £428.4 million
1991–92: £379.0 million
1992–93: £382.7 million
1993–94: £365.5 million
1994–95: £364.0 million

Local Government Finance

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each district and islands council in each year from 1989–90 to 1995–96 (i) the planned and (ii) the outturn expenditure on *(a)* housing support grant, *(b)* non-housing revenue account capital allocation and *(c)* housing revenue account capital allocation. [10106]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: For housing support grant, the table sets out the amount of subsidy paid in each year after taking account of any variation orders made. For non-housing revenue account capital and housing revenue account capital, planned expenditure in the tables which follow represents the gross capital allocations issued to each authority taking account of any supplementary allocations or other changes made during the year. Forecast outturn expenditure is provided for 1995–96.

Table A: Housing support grant

	1989–90 £	*1990–91* £	*1991–92* £	*1992–93* £	*1993–94* £	*1994–95* £	*Forecast 1995–97* £
Borders							
Berwickshire	48,841	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ettrick and Lauderdale	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Roxburgh	1,339,141	1,321,472	1,139,087	726,723	204,134	0	0
Tweeddale	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Central							
Clackmannan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Falkirk	0	0	91,878	123,120	154,770	156,400	190,563
Stirling	0	0	132,696	116,455	137,399	171,854	202,603
Dumfries and Galloway							
Annandale and Eskdale	1,684,048	1,504,110	1,288,127	1,151,985	686,273	498,105	18,934
Nithsdale	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stewartry	509,240	436,944	175,842	208,499	80,855	0	0
Wigtown	551,246	600,795	455,431	360,746	0	0	0
Fife							
Dunfermline	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kirkcaldy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North-East Fife	0	0	0	0	0	63,384	32,556
Grampian							
City of Aberdeen	0	0	0	0	0	34,247	136,248
Banff and Buchan	136,883	0	0	0	0	0	27,593
Gordon	3,788,264	3,792,482	3,808,288	3,598,836	2,982,207	2,770,438	2,894,349
Kincardine and Deeside	1,922,521	1,882,382	1,828,221	1,587,282	1,460,318	897,418	867,774
Moray	528,935	0	0	0	0	36,735	63,944
Highland							
Badenoch and Strathspey	393,499	386,736	330,314	326,070	242,217	165,688	73,030
Caithness	1,229,421	1,330,831	1,249,076	1,161,797	790,443	433,200	240,050
Inverness	1,949,824	1,934,977	1,657,779	1,299,935	436,489	55,190	104,126
Lochaber	2,148,759	2,398,530	2,463,394	2,315,434	2,028,174	2,007,230	1,938,660
Nairn	344,628	350,804	306,917	246,839	223,819	107,455	96,627
Ross and Cromarty	4,154,244	4,231,891	4,159,560	4,060,836	3,777,488	3,617,536	3,051,099
Skye and Lochalsh	1,203,495	1,303,836	1,343,234	1,339,757	1,305,608	1,280,697	1,364,216
Sutherland	969,864	1,006,044	992,735	853,085	758,411	664,305	677,938
Lothian							
East Lothian	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
City of Edinburgh	0	0	526,144	535,752	512,148	551,933	440,243
Midlothian	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
West Lothian	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Strathclyde							
Argyll and Bute	1,775,900	1,041,664	618,210	315,749	51,203	78,175	85,588
Bearsden and Milngavie	278,995	317,125	301,748	73,749	0	0	0
Clydebank	1,010,546	650,646	438,557	150,464	0	0	0
Clydesdale	0	0	0	0	0	0	16,374
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cumnock and Doon Valley	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table A: Housing support grant

	1989–90 £	1990–91 £	1991–92 £	1992–93 £	1993–94 £	1994–95 £	Forecast 1996–97 £
Cunninghame	0	0	7,774	10,760	22,996	33,428	53,238
Dumbarton	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
East Kilbride	0	0	61,626	100,892	91,443	136,479	213,639
Eastwood	0	0	8,108	11,583	12,449	36,633	65,754
City of Glasgow	30,697,621	24,536,123	22,687,417	17,400,837	11,103,999	594,732	125,968
Hamilton	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Inverclyde	0	0	153,317	169,044	157,531	164,529	158,194
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	0	0	2,382	15,273	16,954	32,469	37,118
Kyle and Carrick	0	0	0	6,720	58,711	50,032	89,768
Monklands	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Motherwell	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Renfrew	0	0	28,488	36,735	33,768	37,524	83,701
Strathkelvin	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tayside							
Angus	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
City of Dundee	0	0	0	0	0	0	51,151
Perth and Kinross	0	0	29,303	27,462	47,026	80,609	83,690
Islands areas							
Orkney Islands	776,917	783,399	639,138	359,131	266,699	0	0
Shetland Islands	4,112,702	4,395,805	4,603,666	4,592,216	4,249,266	4,982,433	4,389,242
Western Isles	3,741,152	3,757,098	3,907,490	4,186,649	3,959,316	4,433,909	4,086,242
Scotland	65,296,686	57,963,694	55,435,945	47,470,415	35,852,114	24,172,768	21,960,221

Table B: Non-housing revenue account capital

£ million

	1989–90		1990–91		1991–92		1992–93	
	Planned expenditure	Outturn expenditure	Planned expenditure	Outturn expenditure	Planned expenditure	Outturn expenditure	Planned expenditure	Outturn expenditure
Borders								
Berwickshire	0.449	0.377	0.489	0.470	0.461	0.458	0.575	0.455
Ettrick and Lauderdale	0.790	0.808	0.732	0.739	0.622	0.623	0.833	0.816
Roxburgh	0.592	0.621	0.590	0.635	0.616	0.616	1.026	1.022
Tweeddale	0.400	0.252	0.371	0.324	0.405	0.347	0.470	0.468
Central								
Clackmannan	0.425	0.395	0.476	0.457	0.532	0.452	0.661	0.589
Falkirk	1.318	1.314	1.420	1.417	1.460	1.458	1.639	1.611
Stirling	1.052	1.083	1.057	1.085	1.139	1.175	1.719	1.715
Dumfries and Galloway								
Annandale and Eskdale	0.420	0.360	0.380	0.427	0.345	0.262	0.710	0.524
Nithsdale	0.860	0.788	1.101	1.064	1.143	1.153	1.579	1.198
Stewartry	0.302	0.237	0.296	0.290	0.287	0.282	0.439	0.435
Wigtown	0.765	0.616	0.718	0.545	0.695	0.769	0.835	0.808
Fife								
Dunfermline	0.971	0.934	0.867	0.835	1.012	0.888	1.119	0.667
Kirkcaldy	1.493	1.370	1.376	1.422	1.610	1.616	1.376	1.376
North-East Fife	1.610	1.512	1.801	1.290	1.512	1.652	1.416	1.416
Grampian								
Aberdeen	4.342	4.405	4.128	3.701	4.543	4.876	5.081	6.041
Banff and Buchan	1.009	0.730	1.138	0.802	1.002	0.674	1.325	0.932
Gordon	0.860	0.899	0.786	0.842	1.280	1.261	0.929	0.928
Kincardine and Deeside	0.809	0.636	0.982	0.790	0.850	0.848	1.004	1.030
Moray	0.842	0.897	1.038	1.038	1.264	1.459	0.969	0.968
Highland								
Badenoch and Strathspey	0.459	0.414	0.322	0.320	0.368	0.186	0.166	0.139
Caithness	0.886	0.536	0.966	0.824	0.925	0.672	1.083	0.575
Inverness	1.468	1.102	1.456	1.332	1.406	0.829	1.109	0.856
Lochaber	0.792	0.777	0.773	0.635	0.595	0.595	0.730	0.726
Nairn	0.135	0.127	0.141	0.131	0.158	0.156	0.161	0.145

Table B: Non-housing revenue account capital

£ million

	1989–90		1990–91		1991–92		1992–93	
	Planned expenditure	*Outturn expenditure*	*Planned expenditure*	*Outturn expenditure*	*Planned expenditure*	*Outturn expenditure*	*Planned expenditure*	*Outturn expenditure*
Ross and Cromarty	2.542	2.580	2.575	2.520	2.339	2.277	3.558	3.458
Skye and Lochalsh	0.851	0.898	0.794	0.889	0.859	0.884	0.969	0.966
Sutherland	0.630	0.582	0.684	0.574	0.645	0.655	0.780	0.774
Lothian								
East Lothian	2.191	2.191	1.716	1.721	1.545	1.545	1.159	1.021
Edinburgh	33.962	37.214	28.210	30.865	18.160	18.915	25.426	25.439
Midlothian	0.877	0.877	0.747	0.517	0.811	0.562	0.924	0.684
West Lothian	0.805	0.837	0.854	0.867	0.853	0.852	0.833	0.842
Strathclyde								
Argyll and Bute	4.970	4.970	4.445	3.946	5.406	5.219	6.075	6.094
Bearsden and Milngavie	0.395	0.375	0.320	0.304	0.411	0.406	0.323	0.319
Clydebank	1.005	0.599	1.015	0.865	0.657	0.395	0.413	0.360
Clydesdale	0.774	0.774	0.811	0.819	0.772	0.775	0.789	0.765
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	0.832	0.467	0.526	0.399	0.767	0.438	0.745	0.563
Cumnock and Doon Valley	0.298	0.316	0.338	0.357	0.378	0.284	0.365	0.303
Cunninghame	3.369	3.282	3.528	3.426	3.538	3.609	3.292	3.443
Dumbarton	0.741	0.965	0.537	0.503	0.696	0.702	0.846	0.842
East Kilbride	0.243	0.145	0.274	0.293	0.257	0.293	0.289	0.286
Eastwood	0.347	0.300	0.268	0.316	0.169	0.160	0.479	0.211
Glasgow	54.853	52.994	35.706	35.623	24.951	24.904	25.444	25.385
Hamilton	1.513	1.530	1.553	1.530	1.613	1.615	1.460	1.417
Inverclyde	3.896	3.923	2.716	2.717	3.029	3.070	4.214	4.214
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	0.450	0.436	0.434	0.433	0.577	0.572	0.512	0.528
Kyle and Carrick	0.684	0.712	0.512	0.570	0.564	0.760	0.669	0.701
Monklands	0.788	0.413	0.955	1.049	0.868	0.867	1.003	1.004
Motherwell	0.829	0.831	0.619	0.512	0.808	0.757	0.978	0.888
Renfrew	4.254	4.731	4.168	4.516	4.195	4.334	4.290	4.290
Strathkelvin	0.656	0.536	0.579	0.614	0.574	0.437	0.776	0.746
Tayside								
Angus	0.758	0.758	0.690	0.661	0.729	0.670	0.841	0.755
Dundee	4.909	4.153	4.761	3.600	5.371	5.252	4.622	4.586
Perth and Kinross	2.526	2.220	1.303	1.087	1.378	1.359	2.146	2.146
Islands areas								
Orkney	1.207	1.259	1.263	0.783	1.386	0.084	1.674	0.289
Shetland	0.684	0.340	0.502	0.310	0.266	0.197	0.578	0.578
Western Isles	3.919	3.418	4.771	4.948	4.533	4.549	4.495	4.510
Scotland	159.807	156.816	131.614	129.549	113.335	110.705	127.921	123.874

£ million

	1993–94		1994–95		1995–96	
	Planned expenditure	*Outturn expenditure*	*Planned expenditure*	*Outturn expenditure*	*Planned expenditure*	*Forecast outturn expenditure*
Borders						
Berwickshire	0.529	0.529	0.500	0.475	0.518	0.518
Ettrick and Lauderdale	0.727	0.725	0.801	0.798	0.703	0.700
Roxburgh	0.801	0.794	0.926	0.897	0.829	0.829
Tweeddale	0.543	0.538	0.855	0.618	0.521	0.490
Central						
Clackmannan	0.741	0.627	0.814	0.728	0.728	0.754
Falkirk	1.482	1.477	1.605	1.574	1.631	1.600
Stirling	1.679	1.700	2.117	2.117	1.600	1.799
Dumfries and Galloway						
Annandale and Eskdale	0.493	0.473	0.505	0.481	0.518	0.500
Nithsdale	1.350	1.223	1.324	1.167	1.146	1.100
Stewartry	0.326	0.129	0.442	0.363	0.311	0.300
Wigtown	0.759	0.705	0.995	0.972	0.723	0.727
Fife						
Dunfermline	0.995	0.992	0.973	0.936	1.035	1.000
Kirkcaldy	1.292	1.073	1.156	1.055	1.244	1.206
North-East Fife	1.357	1.266	1.519	1.358	1.349	1.330

£ million

	1993–94		1994–95		1995–96	
	Planned expenditure	Outturn expenditure	Planned expenditure	Outturn expenditure	Planned expenditure	Forecast outturn expenditure
Grampian						
Aberdeen	3.712	3.702	4.269	4.030	4.468	4.300
Banff and Buchan	1.459	0.688	1.083	0.943	1.353	1.300
Gordon	0.920	0.893	1.799	1.766	0.933	1.883
Kincardine and Deeside	0.974	0.952	1.200	1.159	0.939	0.500
Moray	1.592	1.593	1.312	1.312	1.353	1.586
Highland						
Badenoch and Strathspey	0.277	0.154	0.295	0.203	0.311	0.300
Caithness	0.895	1.106	0.766	0.732	0.725	0.711
Inverness	1.170	1.170	1.386	1.386	1.018	1.018
Lochaber	1.093	1.114	0.981	0.972	0.809	0.800
Nairn	0.163	0.058	0.146	0.147	0.199	0.200
Ross and Cromarty	3.798	3.792	3.693	3.692	3.201	3.251
Skye and Lochalsh	0.919	0.928	1.020	1.011	0.909	0.915
Sutherland	0.663	0.607	0.793	0.777	0.716	0.658
Lothian						
East Lothian	1.727	1.094	1.802	1.837	1.565	1.396
Edinburgh	20.466	20.491	26.244	26.269	18.875	20.508
Midlothian	0.962	0.855	0.988	-0.988	0.466	0.466
West Lothian	0.870	0.874	0.978	1.001	0.877	0.890
Strathclyde						
Argyll and Bute	6.303	6.331	7.007	6.992	5.855	5.906
Bearsden and Milngavie	0.269	0.141	0.179	0.112	0.311	0.311
Clydebank	0.375	0.310	0.446	0.394	0.514	0.495
Clydesdale	0.826	0.826	0.893	0.893	0.800	0.800
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	0.866	0.862	1.063	1.035	0.728	0.700
Cumnock and Doon Valley	0.441	0.441	0.470	0.401	0.514	0.499
Cunninghame	3.529	3.537	3.942	3.957	3.585	3.620
Dumbarton	0.934	0.942	0.940	0.997	0.843	1.150
East Kilbride	0.447	0.429	0.409	0.395	0.414	0.400
Eastwood	0.264	0.156	0.298	0.252	0.311	0.300
Glasgow	25.055	25.030	26.017	25.958	24.159	24.159
Hamilton	1.679	1.618	2.050	1.994	1.656	1.600
Inverclyde	4.691	4.692	4.567	4.621	4.346	4.394
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	0.500	0.511	0.689	0.700	0.589	0.589
Kyle and Carrick	0.847	0.840	1.066	1.019	0.932	0.900
Monklands	1.322	1.289	1.186	1.180	1.106	1.150
Motherwell	0.991	0.989	1.054	1.053	1.001	1.001
Renfrew	4.344	4.356	4.832	4.773	4.259	4.167
Strathkelvin	0.790	0.575	0.717	0.668	0.828	0.800
Tayside						
Angus	0.861	0.742	0.847	0.847	0.900	0.900
Dundee	4.876	3.784	4.680	4.723	4.557	5.166
Perth and Kinross	2.172	2.165	2.216	2.211	2.017	2.040
Islands areas						
Orkney	0.593	0.100	0.972	0.657	0.935	1.100
Shetland	0.468	0.468	0.582	0.582	0.500	0.500
Western Isles	4.686	4.409	5.019	4.871	4.548	4.565
Scotland	122.863	117.865	135.428	133.049	117.781	120.747

Table C: Housing revenue account capital

£ million

	1989–90		1990–91		1991–92		1992–93	
	Planned expenditure	Outturn expenditure	Planned expenditure	Outturn expenditure	Planned expenditure	Outturn expenditure	Planned expenditure	Outturn expenditure
Borders								
Berwickshire	1.000	0.960	0.993	0.949	1.073	1.049	1.097	1.152
Ettrick and Lauderdale	1.875	1.884	1.784	1.797	1.822	1.774	2.206	2.190
Roxburgh	4.279	4.457	4.003	3.963	3.528	3.060	3.045	3.041
Tweeddale	0.439	0.462	0.520	0.549	0.800	0.800	1.275	1.275

Table C: Housing revenue account capital

£ million

	1989–90		1990–91		1991–92		1992–93	
	Planned expenditure	Outturn expenditure	Planned expenditure	Outturn expenditure	Planned expenditure	Outturn expenditure	Planned expenditure	Outturn expenditure
Central								
Clackmannan	4.992	5.371	4.692	4.504	4.524	4.319	4.070	4.277
Falkirk	13.802	13.800	15.333	15.328	17.662	17.575	15.461	15.283
Stirling	8.674	8.631	7.675	7.728	8.396	8.290	8.305	8.254
Dumfries and Galloway								
Annandale and Eskdale	4.500	4.615	3.910	4.098	3.434	3.651	3.333	3.432
Nithsdale	6.154	6.370	5.467	5.788	4.974	4.904	4.890	4.888
Stewartry	1.812	1.992	1.443	1.597	1.863	1.813	1.423	1.438
Wigtown	3.175	3.080	3.396	3.416	3.449	3.519	3.801	3.549
Fife								
Dunfermline	10.470	10.310	10.010	10.001	11.372	10.433	7.845	7.788
Kirkcaldy	12.835	12.370	11.804	11.804	10.261	10.245	7.933	7.933
North-East Fife	5.202	3.877	3.116	4.545	3.473	3.448	3.227	3.225
Grampian								
Aberdeen	14.708	15.032	14.640	15.395	14.699	16.527	16.439	17.293
Banff and Buchan	4.208	4.340	3.777	4.288	5.365	5.358	4.154	4.154
Gordon	7.879	7.991	7.246	7.422	7.106	7.307	6.689	6.492
Kincardine and Deeside	3.656	4.033	4.096	5.318	3.513	4.051	4.323	4.880
Moray	5.387	5.549	4.833	5.078	5.313	5.543	4.351	4.351
Highland								
Badenoch and Strathspey	1.182	1.137	1.408	1.325	1.228	1.365	1.208	1.119
Caithness	3.340	3.569	2.876	3.153	2.697	2.797	3.028	3.044
Inverness	7.173	6.366	7.283	6.672	5.885	5.614	5.608	5.723
Lochaber	4.803	5.152	3.723	3.892	3.093	3.134	3.029	3.104
Nairn	1.117	1.111	1.198	1.160	1.149	1.169	1.174	1.156
Ross and Cromarty	6.083	6.201	5.987	5.635	6.532	5.697	6.592	6.128
Skye and Lochalsh	1.876	1.876	1.765	1.765	1.933	1.872	1.801	1.795
Sutherland	2.337	2.443	1.993	2.044	2.023	2.125	1.918	1.927
Lothian								
East Lothian	8.838	8.916	7.966	8.038	8.267	8.252	7.576	7.576
Edinburgh	33.468	33.068	36.569	37.905	34.853	35.369	29.806	29.852
Midlothian	5.113	4.775	7.269	7.249	5.465	5.426	5.032	5.032
West Lothian	11.234	11.229	7.384	7.470	7.989	8.031	6.811	6.858
Strathclyde								
Argyll and Bute	5.218	4.925	4.831	4.620	5.473	5.173	5.212	5.220
Bearsden and Milngavie	1.682	1.490	2.322	1.622	1.474	1.291	1.434	1.188
Clydebank	6.961	7.145	7.622	7.074	7.213	7.135	6.520	6.461
Clydesdale	4.141	4.089	4.071	4.069	4.122	4.124	4.002	3.969
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	1.831	1.884	1.464	1.947	1.775	1.773	2.109	2.139
Cumnock and Doon Valley	3.170	3.406	2.799	3.363	3.045	3.093	3.641	3.638
Cunninghame	11.410	11.332	11.256	11.393	10.189	10.133	9.036	8.949
Dumbarton	7.518	8.058	8.123	8.547	7.946	7.747	8.593	8.533
East Kilbride	0.761	0.807	0.733	0.712	1.053	1.053	0.986	0.984
Eastwood	1.276	1.154	1.559	1.529	0.937	0.974	0.922	0.857
Glasgow	100.556	100.559	102.406	102.459	99.372	99.280	91.208	91.151
Hamilton	11.597	11.623	11.666	11.750	9.911	9.766	13.070	13.249
Inverclyde	7.156	7.312	7.351	7.635	8.415	8.335	9.899	9.609
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	8.787	8.044	7.033	8.011	7.326	7.321	6.575	6.581
Kyle and Carrick	7.629	7.773	6.945	7.200	8.324	8.483	8.421	8.196
Monklands	15.862	15.502	14.884	15.365	13.389	13.389	13.688	13.308
Motherwell	18.268	18.666	18.431	18.468	19.247	19.241	17.001	16.766
Renfrew	18.835	19.279	20.441	20.803	18.707	18.956	18.231	18.127
Strathkelvin	5.678	6.012	5.618	5.930	6.209	6.402	5.239	5.274
Tayside								
Angus	5.522	4.993	5.643	5.549	5.803	5.415	5.710	5.806
Dundee	23.786	21.953	25.194	24.639	18.301	17.413	18.280	17.967
Perth and Kinross	7.478	8.017	5.796	5.720	6.359	6.812	6.301	6.300
Islands areas								
Orkney	1.142	1.142	1.045	1.190	1.142	0.645	0.937	0.607
Shetland	4.979	5.287	5.347	5.489	5.267	5.353	4.428	4.465
Western Isles	4.902	5.310	4.561	4.148	5.045	4.754	4.683	4.885
Scotland	487.756	486.729	481.300	489.108	469.785	468.578	443.576	442.438

£ million

	1993–94		1994–95		1995–96	
	Planned expenditure	Outturn expenditure	Planned expenditure	Outturn expenditure	Planned expenditure	Forecast outturn expenditure
Borders						
Berwickshire	1.341	1.197	1.110	1.088	1.122	0.346
Ettrick and Lauderdale	2.289	2.286	2.003	1.967	1.986	1.569
Roxburgh	3.044	2.993	4.082	4.007	3.085	3.158
Tweeddale	1.520	1.513	0.783	0.783	1.200	1.150
Central						
Clackmannan	3.561	3.733	3.691	3.712	4.019	3.716
Falkirk	13.721	13.675	14.106	13.727	15.479	11.930
Stirling	7.686	7.780	7.788	7.664	8.139	7.970
Dumfries and Galloway						
Annandale and Eskdale	4.212	4.081	3.426	3.405	3.321	2.643
Nithsdale	5.516	5.561	5.094	5.078	5.116	5.100
Stewartry	1.702	1.702	1.519	1.519	1.700	1.157
Wigtown	3.324	3.234	3.221	3.105	3.198	3.413
Fife						
Dunfermline	7.320	7.060	9.194	9.090	8.304	9.066
Kirkcaldy	7.533	7.350	7.735	7.481	7.454	8.229
North-east Fife	4.147	4.174	4.685	4.591	3.744	2.912
Grampian						
Aberdeen	17.557	18.082	18.123	18.161	15.862	20.700
Banff and Buchan	5.165	5.165	5.546	5.546	5.500	4.248
Gordon	6.831	6.610	7.418	7.232	6.686	4.983
Kincardine and Deeside	3.336	3.262	3.598	3.185	3.760	5.970
Moray	5.832	5.832	6.375	6.211	5.064	3.453
Highland						
Badenoch and Strathspey	1.515	1.524	1.125	1.032	1.032	1.000
Caithness	2.338	2.310	3.502	3.497	2.305	2.297
Inverness	4.647	4.766	6.127	6.233	5.176	5.285
Lochaber	3.140	3.290	3.720	3.860	3.110	4.050
Nairn	0.985	0.981	1.111	1.104	0.807	0.800
Ross and Cromarty	5.839	5.791	5.531	5.510	5.171	5.096
Skye and Lochalsh	1.744	1.687	1.645	1.581	1.556	1.550
Sutherland	1.789	1.743	1.964	2.065	1.749	1.376
Lothian						
East Lothian	7.462	7.435	8.007	8.007	6.964	6.714
Edinburgh	29.004	29.078	32.697	32.548	33.505	30.834
Midlothian	6.091	6.091	7.455	7.455	6.284	5.540
West Lothian	7.817	7.746	7.800	7.800	8.400	6.679
Strathclyde						
Argyll and Bute	4.971	4.973	4.573	4.591	4.732	3.354
Bearsden and Milngavie	1.590	1.165	1.784	1.590	1.860	1.558
Clydebank	5.469	5.278	5.686	5.480	6.540	5.582
Clydesdale	3.755	3.755	3.855	3.854	3.401	3.600
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	1.680	1.617	1.761	1.672	1.826	1.621
Cumnock and Doon Valley	3.821	3.734	3.819	3.711	3.728	3.355
Cunninghame	8.973	8.677	9.549	9.263	9.611	7.983
Dumbarton	8.716	8.635	8.405	8.418	6.977	7.095
East Kilbride	0.827	0.854	1.194	1.177	1.117	0.931
Eastwood	1.090	0.958	1.929	1.826	1.353	1.344
Glasgow	101.471	101.443	98.312	98.291	93.842	91.882
Hamilton	9.380	9.380	12.661	12.661	10.050	7.231
Inverclyde	10.046	10.045	10.724	10.724	9.100	9.256
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	6.129	6.158	6.113	6.113	5.800	5.800
Kyle and Carrick	9.024	9.024	9.783	9.783	7.100	7.100
Monklands	12.654	12.500	16.358	15.979	13.509	14.530
Motherwell	18.051	17.551	19.519	19.420	17.149	15.917
Renfrew	18.855	18.855	18.302	18.302	20.080	24.620
Strathkelvin	5.354	5.348	5.152	5.152	6.050	5.362
Tayside						
Angus	5.462	5.313	6.367	6.279	5.388	4.712
Dundee	16.708	16.294	18.458	18.182	19.119	17.116
Perth and Kinross	11.810	11.800	8.526	8.525	6.857	7.009

£ million

	1993–94		1994–95		1995–96	
	Planned expenditure	Outturn expenditure	Planned expenditure	Outturn expenditure	Planned expenditure	Forecast outturn expenditure
Islands Areas						
Orkney	0.540	0.599	0.623	0.636	0.637	0.650
Shetland	4.128	4.073	5.053	4.907	4.546	4.400
Western Isles	3.484	3.375	3.700	3.677	3.503	3.312
Scotland	451.996	449.136	472.387	468.457	444.673	428.254

Woodlands

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all Forestry Commission woodlands currently on the market, indicating for each *(a)* its time on the market, *(b)* its approximate size, *(c)* its location relative to a town or village and *(d)* whether an access agreement has been made to ensure continuing public access. [6092]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The following Forestry Commission woodlands are currently for sale on the open market:

Name of property	Area (hectares)	Time on market (months)	Location (m=miles)
England			
Buckinghamshire			
Stoke Park Wood	64	3	6m north of Milton Keynes
Cambridgeshire			
Great and Little Widgham Woods	55	3	6m south of Newmarket
Salome Wood	23	3	8m north west of Huntingdon
Cornwall			
Port Eliot	76	26	6m west of Plymouth
Prideaux	24	4	3m north east of St. Austell
Wheal Par	6	5	2m north east of St. Austell
Cumbria			
Bird Dyke (part)	9	3	8m east of Whitehaven
Chalk Plains	40	3	6m east of Wigtown
Denton Fell	627	3	5m east of Brampton
Leesrigg Plantation	17	3	15m south west of Carlisle
Nuthill and Simpson's Wood	14	3	5m east of Cockermouth
Sunderland Gill	28	3	5m north east of Cockermouth
Derbyshire			
Kennel Wood	5	14	4m south east of Matlock
Moorhall Wood	8	14	5m north of Matlock
Devon			
Deershill	11	5	2m south east of Great Torrington
Durham			
Stanley Wood Cottages	31	26	3m north of Crook
Humberside			
Grenwickdale Wood	37	20	6m south west of Pocklington
Kent			
Cole Wood'	22	4	4m south west of Ashford
Lancashire			
Tythe Barn Plantation	8	3	3m east of Carnforth
Leicestershire			
Bolt Wood	27	3	3m south west of Uppingham
Clipsham (part)	14	14	8m south west of Bourne
Lincolnshire			
Hurn Wood	9	3	5m south east of Grantham
Norfolk			
Foulden Broom Covert	6	3	3m north west of Munford
Great Wood Outliers	18	3	7m south west of Aysham
Old Wood, Sheringham	23	1	2m south of Sheringham
West Rudham	78	2	7m south west of Fakenham
North Yorkshire			
Seaton Ross Woods	43	26	2m west of Holme on Spalding Moor
Northamptonshire			
Sandpit Copse	3	14	8m north of Milton Keynes
Nottinghamshire			
Dilliner Wood	20	2	6m north west of Newark on Trent
Nut Wood	9	14	6m north west of Newark on Trent
Shropshire			
Coed Detton	14	61	1m north of Knighton
Somerset			
Higher Bitcombe	30	61	4m south west of Frome
South Yorkshire			
Greensprings Wood	12	26	5m south of Barnsley
Old Park Wood'	41	26	4m south west of Barnsley
Owston and Duckholt Woods	66	4	4m north of Doncaster
Suffolk			
Barthorps Folly	6	3	6m south east of Woodbridge
Warwickshire			
Wappenbury Wood	74	2	3m south of Coventry
Wiltshire			
Heywood	20	1	1m north of Chippenham
Southgrove	39	1	7m south east of Marlborough

Name of property	Area (hectares)	Time on market (months)	Location (m=miles)
Scotland			
Borders			
Edgarhope	143	9	1m west of Lauder
Priesthaugh[1]	787	4	7m south west of Hawick
Dumfries and Galloway			
Glaik	68	9	5m west of Stranraer
Grampian			
Auchinroath Plantation	62	8	1m north of Rothes
Auqharney (part)[1]	133	14	8m west of Peterhead
Elchies Blocks	103	3	In Archiestown
Glenbuchat	539	13	2m north of Strathdon
Tulloch Wood[1]	239	5	2m east of Dufftown
Highland			
Abriachan Plantation	865	14	1m east of Drumnadrochit
Ardelve, Arvernish Wood	26	30	5m south east of Kyle of Lochalsh
Achrugan[1]	559	17	20m west of Thurso
Tor Clunes and Castle Spynie	138	1	4m south of Beauly
Strathclyde			
Ardmarnock[1]	1,284	5	1m north of Portavadie
Ardbreaknish	119	2	2m west of Cladish
Crookedstane	347	3	4m south of Elvanfoot
Daljarrock	51	9	10m south of Girvan
Docherneil	83	9	2m north of Pinwherry
Ford	57	2	12m north of Lochgilphead
Glenmard	56	9	1m north of Girvan
Little Clyde	650	3	4m south of Elvanfoot
Tayside			
Camusericht	304	15	13m west of Kinloch Rannoch
Warroch	68	5	5m west of Kinross
Wales			
Clwyd			
Blackthorn Covert	22	5	1m south west of Abergele
Castle Great Wood	49	5	1m west of Abergele
Coed Melin y Moch	12	15	3m west of Ruthin
Crown Wood	29	21	2m west of Holywell
Dyfed			
Allt Cil y Llyn Fawr	3	36	5m west of Llandovery
Allt Maestir	23	2	2m north west of Lampeter
Blaenwaun Wood	6	2	1m north of Lampeter
Cilflower Wood	3	4	2m south east of Cardigan
Falcondale Big Wood	10	2	1m north of Lampeter
Hen Feddau, Ty Hen and Long Wood	23	2	1m north west of Lampeter
Penhill Wood	4	9	1m south east of Llandovery
Ty'r Shyme	6	4	6m north of Carmarthen
Waun Baglan[1]	26	7	2m south of Kidwelly
Wern Fach	4	36	3m north east of Lampeter
Gwent			
Craig yr Arail	58	6	1m north of Abertillery
Gwynedd			
Aberdunant (part)	16	15	2m north of Portmadog
Amnodd Wood	88	5	6m east of Trawsfynydd
Cefn Glas	12	5	6m east of Trawsfynydd
Cwm Prysor	56	5	5m east of Trawsfynydd
Factory Covert	5	3	3m north west of Criccieth
Gwinllan Rhos Ddu	10	3	3m north west of Criccieth
Rhiwbach and Tyddyn Bach[1]	106	8	2m east of Bleinau Pfestiniog
Ynysfor (part)	4	14	3m north of Portmadog
Powys			
Dafarneithin Hill	10	2	2m east of Rhayader
Llandegley Rhos	37	2	3m east of Llandrindod Wells
Wern Wood	13	2	2m west of Welshpool
Y Wern[1]	453	2	3m north east of Ystradgynlais
Ysfa	9	2	2m south east of Rhayader
West Glamorgan			
Graig Ynysgollen	10	10	4m north east of Neath
Nant y Stalwyn[1]	44	27	1m east of Seven Sisters

[1] Woodlands where a legal agreement to protect public access on foot has been concluded. For the other woodlands, either the local authority or a third party with an interest has declined to enter into an access agreement.

Cairngorms Partnership

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions have taken place between his Department and the chairman of the Cairngorms Partnership relating to the number of individuals on the organisation's board and the levels of remuneration which are currently being made to the members of the board. [9572]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* The chairman of the Cairngorms Partnership and my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Scotland discussed the original composition of the board which was set up to reflect the widest possible range of interests in the area. My right hon. Friend determined that the rate of remuneration for the chairman should be assessed by comparison with members of Scottish Natural Heritage. Remuneration of members of the partnership board is similarly by comparison with members of the boards of non-departmental public bodies.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what safeguards his Department has put in place to prevent abuse of the remunerative arrangements pertaining to the board of the Cairngorms Partnership. [9573]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* A framework document has been prepared by officials from the Scottish Office, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Cairngorms Partnership. This sets out the framework for the administrative and financial arrangements of the partnership and includes provision for monitoring of all expenditure incurred by the partnership. This includes ensuring value for money and ensuring that adequate systems are in place to secure propriety and regularity of payments and prudent and economic administration.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will instruct officials of his Department to investigate urgently the current remuneration levels of the board of the Cairngorms Partnership. [9574]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* No. The level of remuneration paid to the board is in line with that paid to members of boards of non-departmental public bodies.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects the board of the Cairngorms Partnership to be in a position to provide a response to the report of the working party on the future of the Cairngorms; and if he will indicate the timetable stipulated by the Scottish Office at the time the partnership was established governing the publication of the group's response to the report of the working party. [9575]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* The Cairngorms Partnership, which became operational in May 1995, was asked to produce a draft management strategy for the Cairngorms area within a year of its establishment. It is expected that a draft strategy document will be published before the end of May 1996.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received about the conduct of the board of the Cairngorms Partnership with particular reference to the levels of remuneration being paid to board members and the levels of expenditure being incurred in operating the organisation. [9576]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* No such representations have been received.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the current membership of the board of the Cairngorms partnership indicating in the case of those individuals currently on local authorities whether they are also now members of the new shadow unitary authorities; and if the membership of the board of the Cairngorms partnership will be reviewed as a result of local government reform. [9577]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* The information requested is as follows:

Mr. David Laird (Chairman)
Dr. Robert Aitken
Mr. Stuart Black
Mr. Richard Cooke
Mr. Roy Dennis
Mr. Robert Dunsmore
Ms Helen Geddes
Mr. John Grant
Mr. Stuart Housden
Mr. Simon Miller
Dr. Roger Owen
Mrs. Sheena Slimon
Mr. Hamish Swan
Dr. Adam Watson

Local authorities representatives

	Current local authority	*Elected to new council*
Councillor Mary Levie	Grampian Regional Council	—
Councillor Norman Donald	Gordon District Council	—
Councillor Tom Donoghue	Kincardine and Deeside District Council	Aberdeenshire
Councillor Ian Lawson	Moray District Council	—
Councillor Basil Dunlop	Highland Regional Council	Highland
Councillor Charles Haggerty	Badenoch and Strathspey District Council	—
Councillor Alex Shand	Tayside Regional Council	Angus
Councillor Andrew Thomson	Angus District Council	—
Councillor Alex Murray	Perth and Kinross District Council	Perth and Kinross

The nine local authority representatives serve on the board until 31 March 1996. The partnership will shortly be approaching the new shadow unitary authorities seeking their nominations for representation on the board.

Munitions Dumping

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what *(a)* statutory controls and *(b)* other safeguards governed the dumping of munitions in Beaufort's dyke during the period since 1966. [9853]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* There were no statutory controls on dumping at sea prior to the Dumping at Sea Act 1974 which was replaced in 1985 by part II of the Food and Environment Protection Act. The dumping of munitions by the Ministry of Defence was governed by appropriate operational procedures.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will extend the scope of the investigations into the dumping of munitions in the Irish channel to include the firth of Clyde and the area of the sea bed around the natural gas pipeline constructed in 1993 from Scotland to the Irish Republic. [9854]

Mr. Robertson *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* Details of further survey work in the area will be announced in due course.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what investigation his Department commissioned into the washing up of munitions along the south-west coast of Scotland and on the Isle of Man in 1993; and what were the findings. [9868]

(2) what actions were taken by his Department in 1993 to respond to public concern about the washing up of munitions along the south-west coast of Scotland. [9869]

Mr. Robertson *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* There was no direct Scottish Office involvement in or investigation of this incident which was dealt with by the emergency services.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what investigations his Department carried out on the condition of munitions dumped at Beaufort's dyke prior to the recent study published by the marine laboratory at Aberdeen; and what studies have been undertaken by other Government Departments into this matter. [9851]

Mr. Robertson *[holding answer 17 January 1996]:* The Scottish Office has not carried out any such investigations nor is my right hon. Friend aware of other Government Departments having done so.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what occasions since 1966 the Scottish Office has been made aware of the washing up of munitions along the coast of the south-west of Scotland and the firth of Clyde. [9852]

Mr. Robertson *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* No consolidated record of such occurrences is held by the Scottish Office.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 19 January 1996

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Former Yugoslavia

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made to ensure the withdrawal from Bosnia-Herzegovina of Mujahedden fighters in accordance with the peace accord. [10287]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Under the terms of the Bosnia peace agreement, the deadline for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Bosnia expired on 13 January. NATO has reported general compliance, although some individuals remain in theatre. Efforts to ensure full compliance continue.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what protests he has made to the Croatian Government about the expulsion and harassment of ethnic Serbs in the Krajina; what the Croat response has been; and what further communication he has had with the Croatian Government about the situation in the Krajina. [10291]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Following the Croatian offensive in the Krajina in August 1995, we joined EU partners in condemning the action and calling for the refugees who fled to be allowed to return. The EU also suspended negotiations on a trade and co-operation agreement and the PHARE programme. Since then, we have supported the UN Security Council statement condemning continued Croatian human rights abuses in the area. We have made it clear to the Croatian Government that there is no prospect of their developing a close relationship with the EU while the treatment of minorities in Croatia continues to cause concern. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs made these points personally to President Tudjman during his visit in September.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps are being taken by the UN war crimes tribunal to bring to justice Croats alleged to have committed war crimes in the Krajina. [10290]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The tribunal does not comment on operational aspects of its investigations. However, its mandate is to investigate those accused of war crimes in the former Yugoslavia, regardless of ethnic origin.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has in respect of relations between the Muslims and Croats in Bogojono in central Bosnia; and what problems IFOR forces have meet in implementing the peace accord in that area. [10292]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Bugojno is one of the towns included in a small programme agreed at Dayton for the return of a limited number of displaced persons to their places of origin. Two hundred Bosnian Croat families were to return to Bugojno. The majority have yet to do so.

IFOR has not reported encountering any serious problems in implementing the peace agreement in the area around Bugojno.

ENVIRONMENT

County Hall, London

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what property belonging to the London residuary body still remains in county hall, London SE1. [8775]

Sir Paul Beresford: None.

Imported Animals and Birds

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what changes he has made since 1990 to the controls over the import of species deemed by his Department to be unlikely to survive in captivity. [8778]

Mr. Clappison: EC regulations governing the import of endangered species into the Community fully superseded national legislation on completion of the single market in 1993. In June 1995, the Council of Ministers reached political agreement on a new EC wildlife trade regulation which would enable member states collectively to impose restrictions on the import of live specimens of species which have a high mortality rate during shipment or which are unlikely to survive in captivity. Subject to satisfactory completion of its remaining stages, the proposed regulation is expected to come into force on 1 January 1997.

Kent County Council (Interest Charges)

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what sum in debt interest was charged by Kent county council in *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)* 1994–95. [10441]

Sir Paul Beresford: The debt interest paid by Kent county council from the general fund revenue account was £37,170.000 in 1993–94 and £38,492,000 in 1994–95.

Local Government Reform, Leicester

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to lay the order conferring unitary status on the city of Leicester. [10529]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Leicestershire (City of Leicester and District of Rutland) (Structural Change) Order 1996 was laid yesterday, Thursday 18 January 1996.

Social Rented Housing (Consultation)

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what responses he has received to the consultation document "More Choice in the Social Rented Sector" issued on 13 July 1995; and if he will make a statement. [11312]

Mr. Curry: The consultation paper set out Government proposals to increase competition in the social rented sector by removing current restrictions on who should be able to compete for Housing Corporation grant or take on transferred local authority housing. It argued that new forms of non-profit landlord should be able to register with the corporation, and that a licensing system should be established to enable profit-making landlords to receive grant and transferred stock. A series of proposals regarding the monitoring and regulation of social housing were put forward, including rent controls and provisions to recoup excessive surpluses. The paper also proposed the establishment of a statutory ombudsman for the independent social rented sector, and sought views on the appropriate approach to determining the standards to which housing schemes must conform.

Two hundred and sixty responses were received. A list of respondents has been placed in the Library of the House. Copies of individual responses may be obtained through the Library. In addition, four responses were submitted on a confidential basis.

These replies have been considered carefully. The Government have decided to proceed at once with proposals to allow new forms of non-profit landlord, such as local housing companies, to register with the Housing Corporation, and to establish a statutorily independent ombudsman. The necessary provisions are contained in the Housing Bill which was published today. The Bill also provides new powers for the Housing Corporation to protect publicly funded stock and tenants' interests in the event of a landlord becoming insolvent.

In order to facilitate further transfers of local authority stock to these and other registered landlords, the Government will adopt a more flexible approach to the size limit for transfers. In future, transfers over the 5,000 dwellings limit will be eligible in exceptional circumstances. My Department intends to issue revised guidance on housing transfers incorporating advice on this and other policy changes.

The Government also intend to take forward its proposals to introduce profit-making landlords to the sector, with the associated controls over rents and surpluses. Because of the urgent need to deal with leasehold issues in a Bill of manageable size, legislation to effect this proposal will be deferred. My Department will consult on draft clauses for these provisions, with a view to including them in future legislation. Given the postponement of legislation on opening up competition on housing association grant to profit-making companies, the Government do not intend to abolish tax relief grant at this stage.

On scheme development standards, the Housing Corporation will retain the present approach for the time being. The Department of Environment and the Housing Corporation are commissioning a study into the feasibility of developing a series of housing quality indicators. A report is expected in May. A further statement on scheme development standards will be made at that time.

Housing Legislation

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to amend part I of the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993. [11313]

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 18 January, in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) a number of proposals to strengthen leaseholders' rights against unreasonable behaviour by their landlords. One of these proposals was to bring forward amendments to the Housing Bill, which is published today, to permit collective enfranchisement in properties where flying freeholds have been created.

In addition, the Housing Bill contains four provisions, all of a relatively technical nature, to amend the provisions of the 1993 Act relating to leasehold enfranchisement of flats and to the right to buy an extended lease. The provisions are:

(i) to clarify the valuation provisions in schedule 6—leasehold enfranchisement, and schedule 13—premium to be paid for lease extension, in cases where there are intermediate leasehold interests;

(ii) to provide explicit assumptions to be used in valuing the tenant's existing lease and new lease for the purpose of calculating marriage values under schedule 13 to the Act;

(iii) to disregard the effect for valuation purposes of certain transactions which might have the effect of reducing the price to be paid for an extended lease under Schedule 13. If the Bill is enacted in its current form, specified transactions after today—unless in pursuance of certain contracts entered into on or before today—will be disregarded; and

(iv) in cases where flats are owned by trustees, to allow residence by a beneficiary of the trust to satisfy the residence qualifications for enfranchisement and for lease extension.

The provisions amending schedule 13 on valuation will apply to all notices of claim given after today, except in cases where the premium has been agreed or determined before the day the Act is passed. I do not expect these provisions to alter the amount to be paid for acquiring a freehold or a lease extension in the great majority of cases.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Developing Countries (Investment)

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of private flows from the UK to developing countries went to *(a)* the least developed third countries and *(b)* the poorest 50 countries, [8950]

Mr. Hanley: Private flows consist of direct investment, export credit and other flows.

The table gives details of direct investment and private export credit flows from the United Kingdom for the latest available years to the low income countries—56 countries whose GNP per capita was $675 or less in 1992—and to the least developed countries—48 countries defined by the UN as least developed, based on certain economic and social criteria. Some 26 per cent. of total UK direct investment went to low-income countries in 1993. Little

of this was to the least-developed countries, a category which includes many francophone countries where British business has traditionally played only a small role.

Figures on export credits represented net flows—that is, disbursements less repayments. It is not possible to give proportions of the total in this case. Table 2 therefore shows individual country details only.

Country breakdowns of other private flows are not available.

Table 1: Direct investment in 1993

Low income countries	*£ million*
Egypt	13.32
Ghana	35.96
Kenya	35.96
Malawi	4.66
Nigeria	347.65
Tanzania	2.00
Uganda	1.33
Zambia	0.67
Zimbabwe	36.63
Bangladesh	6.66
India	137.86
Pakistan	26.64
Sir Lanka	8.66
China	21.31
Indonesia	15.32
Total	694.63
Total direct investment	2,668
Total as percentage of total direct investment	26 per cent.
LLDCs	
Malawi	4.66
Tanzania	2.00
Uganda	1.33
Zambia	0.67
Bangladesh	6.66
Total	15.32
Total direct investment	2,668
Total as percentage to total direct investment	0.6 per cent.

Table 2: Net private export credits 1994

Low income countries	*£ million*
Egypt	–17.23
Ethiopia	0.13
Ghana	24.07
Ivory Coast	–0.83
Kenya	–30.03
Lesotho	0.11
Malawi	–0.75
Mozambique	–0.12
Tanzania	–0.01
Uganda	–1.20
Zambia	–0.19
Zimbabwe	–8.75
Yemen	–0.09
Bangladesh	–0.91
Bhutan	1.45
India	12.63
Maldives	–0.11
Nepal	–1.38
Pakistan	2.49
Sri Lanka	27.14
China	100.95
Indonesia	69.38
Total	176.75
Total net private export credits	27.13
LLDCs	
Angola	–1.27
Djibouti	–0.35
Ethiopia	0.13
Lesotho	0.11
Malawi	–0.75
Mozambique	–0.12
Tanzania	–0.01
Uganda	–1.20
Zambia	–0.19
Yemen	–0.09
Bangladesh	–0.91
Bhutan	1.45
Maldives	–0.11
Nepal	–1.38
Total	[1]–4.69

[1] A minus sign indicates that *for that year* a country's repayments (as previous advances) exceeded disbursements.

Development Co-operation Policies

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs by what mechanisms British development co-operation policies are co-ordinated at Government level with particular reference to *(a)* debt and *(b)* environmental matters. [8951]

Mr. Hanley: Regular consultations take place between Her Majesty's Treasury, the diplomatic and ODA wings of the FCO and the Export Credits Guarantee Department to ensure that the British Government's developmental objectives are fully reflected in its policies on developing country debt.

Similarly, interdepartmental groups, including representatives from the Overseas Development Administration and the Department of the Environment meet regularly to consider the important relationship between environment and development issues.

Humanitarian Relief

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much United Kingdom aid was spent on humanitarian relief and emergencies in the last year for which figures are available. [9114]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the information contained in table 10 of the 1995 edition of "British Aid Statistics", a copy of which is in the Libraries of the House.

Overseas Aid Budget

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the programmes within the overseas aid budget which will be affected by real expenditure reductions in 1996–97 and the following two years; and by how much each programme will be reduced. [10308]

Mr. Hanley: Planning figures for the period 1996–97 to 1998–99 are being finalised. As usual, the main details of our planned expenditure for this period will be published in the 1996 FCO departmental report in March.

UN Aid Target

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's policy in respect of reaching the agreed UN target for aid as a percentage of GNP. [10561]

Mr. Hanley: We have not set a timetable for reaching the 0.7 per cent. target. Progress towards the target will depend upon our economic circumstances and on other priorities for public expenditure.

In 1994, our aid to GNP ratio was 0.31 per cent. above the average for all OECD donors of 0.29 per cent.

Development Assistance

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 16 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *506*, in respect of the ODA's fundamental expenditure review, if he will list those countries deemed to be in transition. [10764]

Mr. Hanley: Following are countries of central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union which are not also classified as developing countries:

Belarus, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovak Republic and Ukraine.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Overfishing (Irish Box)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the projected annual cost of patrolling the Irish box to prevent overfishing; and what estimate he has formed of the proportion of overfishing likely to be committed by each EU member state. [9268]

Mr. Baldry: Fisheries surveillance and enforcement at sea within British fishery limits, including that part of the Irish box falls within UK jurisdiction, is undertaken by the Royal Navy's fishery protection squadron and vessels from the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency and the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland at an annual operating cost of some £13 million. No separate estimate is made of the cost of patrolling that part of the Irish box falling within British fishery limits.

The measures for regulating fishing effort in western waters, including the Irish box, from 1 January this year, require each member state to monitor the uptake of fishing effort by its vessels over 18m overall length and to take action to prevent fishing activity once any effort allocation for a zone fishery has been exhausted.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the cause of death of the sheep found dead at Dover harbour on 18 December on a truck carrying a consignment of sheep destined for export through Dover; what was done with the carcasses on discovery, and for what reason; what action was taken by his officials in respect of the surviving sheep; where the dead sheep started their journey and what was the final destination stated in the journey plan; if any prosecution is to be brought in respect of the dead animals; and if he will make a statement. [9270]

Mrs. Browning: The two carcasses were found during inspection of the consignment prior to loading on to the vessel at Dover. The driver was directed to proceed to a local premises: the live sheep were unloaded under supervision and behaved normally. Post mortem inspections were carried out on the two dead sheep, which revealed congestion of the lungs. The consignment had set out from Hereford at 09.45 and arrived at Dover at 15.10. The matter has been investigated by the State Veterinary Service and Kent county council but no evidence was found to link the death of the sheep to the conditions of transport. The live sheep were all rested until the following day, when they were re-inspected and allowed to proceed to their final destination in France.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out all the information as to the final destination provided in the journey plans submitted in respect of the export of sheep in May 1995 for field slaughter near Paris; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of the destination with the provisions of paragraph 1*(b)* of article 3 of EC directive 91/628 on the protection of animals during transport; and if he will make a statement. [9351]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* Sheep shown to have been slaughtered at a religious festival near Paris last May had been consigned in late April from a starting point near Dover to an address in Mitry Mory, Paris. There is no evidence to suggest that irregularities occurred in relation to the provisions of directive 91/628. The animals were slaughtered several days after being delivered to their declared destination: there is no reason why they should not have been moved on from that destination after a suitable period of rest, and provision of food and water.

European Union

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what statutory provisions prevent the United Kingdom from unilaterally withdrawing from the common agricultural and common fisheries policies without withdrawing from the European Commission. [9581]

Mr. Baldry: The principles and objectives of the common agricultural policy and common fisheries policy are to be found in articles 38 to 46 of the EC treaty. By virtue of article N of the treaty on European Union, amendments to the EC treaty can be made only by unanimity. This effectively prevents the UK unilaterally withdrawing from these policies even if it were in our interests to do so.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action his Department has taken to trace the previous owners of the herd of cattle containing confirmed BSE cases at Old Hall farm,

Gargrave, if he will list the names and addresses of the owners; and if he will indicate the date of birth and death of each cow. [10445]

Mrs. Browning: When a case of BSE is detected in an animal on a dealer's premises, MAFF makes every effort possible to trace the vendor of the animal and then confirms BSE on the vendor's premises. The detailed information requested would, however be available only at disproportionate cost.

Drift Nets

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to advocate a ban on the use of drift nets in European Union waters. [8769]

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) on 7 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *372*.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the numbers and species of birds and sea mammals trapped and killed in drift nets used in British territorial waters in the last 12-month period for which details are available. [8770]

Mr. Baldry: Drift nets used in British territorial waters do not usually exceed 500 m in length. The Ministry has not made a recent assessment of the numbers and species of birds and sea mammals caught in them. However, some information about by-catches in the English north-east coast salmon drift net fishery was included in the Government's 1991 report on salmon net fisheries. This noted that:

- despite frequently being seen around nets, seals were very rarely caught;
- harbour porpoises occasionally became entangled in the drift nets but, because the fishermen have to remain with their salmon gear, they were normally able to release them;
- guillemots, razorbills and very occasionally puffins were caught but the netsmen endeavoured to remove them alive.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his current estimate of the number of dolphins killed as a result of tuna fishing off the western coasts of Britain during 1995. [8771]

Mr. Baldry: I placed in the Library on 20 December a copy of a report by the sea mammal research unit on cetacean by-catch by UK vessels in the 1995 north-east Atlantic tuna fishery. The report records an observed by-catch of 29 striped dolphins and 17 common dolphins, from which the research unit estimated that the total by-catch by the UK fleet was 104 striped and 61 common dolphins. These figures are a very small proportion of the estimated dolphin population size in the area. I do not have equivalent figures for the dolphins killed by the tuna fishing vessels of other countries.

Cattle Movements

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cattle have been moved from the mainland United Kingdom to Northern Ireland in each month since January 1994 to date. [8781]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* The information requested is shown in the table. The figures are derived from the ANIMO system and show the number of cattle certified for export from Great Britain to Northern Ireland. They remain provisional and subject to amendment.

	1994	*1995*
January	677	3,488
February	534	3,317
March	705	2,093
April	961	1,153
May	1,587	1,656
June	0	1,803
July	289	1,084
August	1,202	2,580
September	1,426	2,092
October	3,809	3,579
November	3,729	1,464
December	3,114	[1]—

[1] Figures have not yet been collated for December 1995.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Doncaster Prison

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the cost-effectiveness of having Home Office controllers at Doncaster prison. [8054]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 19 January 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the cost-effectiveness of having Home Office Controllers at Doncaster.

The Criminal Justice Act (1991) requires every contracted out prison to have a Controller, who is a Crown servant appointed by the Secretary of State.

The Controllers at contracted-out prisons carry out a valuable function in helping to monitor the running and cost effectiveness of those prisons. They offer an independent and objective view of these processes to the Secretary of State and others. Such an objective view might not be provided by the companies themselves. In this respect, the Controllers fulfil a function which is distinct from the day to day management of the prison, and their vital role is provided cost effectively.

Prisons (Mechanical Restraints)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions since January 1990 inmates in HMP Holloway have been kept in bodybelts for more than 12 hours. [8420]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 January 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking on how many occasions since January 1990 inmates in Holloway prison have been kept in bodybelts for more than 12 hours.

There are no occasions where a prisoner has been kept in a bodybelt in Holloway prison for more than 12 hours since 1990.

Sex Offenders

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans Her Majesty's Government have to deal with repeat sex offenders; and if he will make a statement; [9678]

(2) what plans Her Majesty's Government have for the co-ordination on a national level of efforts to apprehend paedophile, child pornographers and those who use child pornography; [9676]

3) what plans Her Majesty's Government have for the adoption of a national register of paedophiles; and if he will make a statement; [9679]

(4) what percentage of people previously convicted of sex offences against children have since November 1993 reoffended after release; and what plans Her Majesty's Government have for monitoring the rate of repeat sex offences against children. [9677]

Mr. Maclean: The Government are considering a range of proposals to deal more effectively with sex offenders. I have already proposed that anyone convicted for the second time of a serious sexual or violent offence should receive an automatic life sentence. They would then only be released when they no longer presented a threat to the public. Full details for these proposals will be set out in a White Paper in the spring.

A national police intelligence network on paedophiles already exists and a dedicated paedophile unit within the National Criminal Intelligence Service maintains a database of those who are actively involved in paedophilia. The unit is responsible for developing and disseminating intelligence on those involved in offences of paedophilia both nationally and internationally. Phoenix, the new criminal records database on the police national computer, will give the police instant access to full details of persons convicted of all serious offences, including paedophile and other sex offences.

Statistics on the convictions and the reconvictions of sex offenders do not separately identify offences against children. The special information requested is not therefore available.

Murder Charges

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to abolish the year and a day rule in respect of murder. [9834]

Mr. Maclean: A Bill to abolish the rule is now before Parliament, having been introduced by the hon. Member for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle) on 13 December 1995.

Ticket Touts

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many arrests have been made in the Metropolitan police area of ticket touts under provisions in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994; and how many prosecutions were subsequently entered into. [8773]

Mr. Maclean: Section 166 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 makes it an offence for an unauthorised person to sell a ticket for a designated football match in a public place or a place to which the public has access or otherwise by way of a trade or business. The offence came into force on 3 November 1994 and since then there have been 189 arrests for this offence in the Metropolitan police area.

The number of prosecutions in the latter part of 1994 cannot be separately identified from other summary offences. Information on 1995 court proceedings data will be available this autumn.

Football Supporters

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions travelling football supporters have been stopped and searched under provisions contained in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. [8774]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not available centrally.

Departmental Costs (Computers)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimated cost of the computer or computers being purchased for his office's C6 division (probation); and what was the original budget for the acquisition of this equipment. [10144]

Mr. Howard: Some 63 personal computers are to be installed in C6 division as part of my Department's programme to provide networked office systems to 2,750 staff in the central areas. The total capital costs for this programme, known as POISE—planned office information systems environment—were estimated in the business case to be £7.6 million over a period of seven years. This estimate remains valid and the capital costs of the C6 division installation may be taken to be proportionate at around £174,000.

Currently there are 72 personal computers in C6 division which were purchased piecemeal or as part of an earlier version of POISE over several years. The estimated cost is £95,000 in total and the purchases were made from a centralised budget set aside for ad hoc information technology support.

In addition, IT equipment is being purchased by the probation services as part of the National Probation Service information systems strategy which covers the needs of the 55 probation services in England and Wales. The estimated capital cost of the national strategy is £31.9 million over five years from 1994–95 to 1998–99. This was the original budget and remains the estimated costs.

Homelessness

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on links between homelessness and offending in the last five years; and what conclusions were reached. [10447]

Mr. Maclean: No such studies have been commissioned to my Department, although a study of young people and crime contains limited data on young runaways. It found that 7 per cent. of a total sample of 1,721 young people in England and Wales aged 14 to 25 reported staying away from home for at least one night without their parents' knowledge prior to the age of 16 and that of these nearly half the females and nearly three quarters of the males had committed at least three offences or one serious offence at some time in their lives.

Prisoners (Housing Benefit)

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what funds have been transferred from the Department of Social Security to his office as a result of the changes in the regulations relating to housing benefit for prisoners. [10454]

Mr. Howard: The information is as follows:

1995–96: £324,000

1996–97: £298,000

1997–98: £305,000

1998–99: £312,000 and beyond

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Plant and Machinery

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was, in the constant prices, investment in new plant and machinery per manufacturing employee in each year since 1973; and what is his estimate of the proportion invested in *(a)* replacing labour and *(b)* increased capacity. [9796]

Mr. Oppenheim: The level of investment in plant and machinery per employee in constant prices for manufacturing industry are shown in the table. Consistent figures for manufacturing employment are not available before 1978. The data do not distinguish the reason for the investment.

Manufacturing investment in plant and machinery per manufacturing employee at 1990 prices

	£
1978	1,395
1979	1,486
1980	1,441
1981	1,278
1982	1,322
1983	1,408
1984	1,694
1985	1,976
1986	2,017
1987	1,869
1988	2,299
1989	2,473
1990	2,437
1991	2,393
1992	2,331
1993	2,266
1994	2,405

Standard Industrial Classification 1992 Section D. Employee figures are for June each year.

Manufacturing Statistics

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were the figures for *(a)* manufacturing employment and *(b)* manufacturing output in (i) 1974, (ii) 1979, (iii) 1984, (iv) 1989 and (v) 1994; and what are the latest figures available for 1995. [9399]

Mr. Oppenheim: Figures for manufacturing employees and output are shown in the table.

Consistent figures for employees are not available for 1974.

	Manufacturing employees-millions	*Manufacturing output 1990 = 100*
1974	—	93.4
1979	6.75	90.6
1984	5.05	82.2
1989	4.85	100.2
1994	3.95	99.2
1995 September	3.94	101.1
1995 November	—	101.4

Figures for employees 1979 to 1994 refer to June each year.
Standard Industrial Classification 1992 Section D.

ICL Technical Plastics

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what amount of regional development grants ICL Technical Plastics received since 1988; at what cost; and for what purpose. [10194]

Mr. Oppenheim: For reasons of commercial confidentiality, we do not disclose details of payments of grants to individual companies. Information on individual accepted offers of regional selective assistance over £75,000 is given in the *Employment Gazette*.

Miners' Working Shifts

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information is currently collected by his Department in respect of the *(a)* shortest, *(b)* longest and *(c)* average length of a miner's working shift in each of the privatised coal companies since 1993. [9950]

Mr. Page: This information is not collected by the Department.

Carbon Monoxide Detectors

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 16 January, *Official Report*, column *497*, if he will ensure that information on the new British Standard for carbon monoxide detectors is included in the gas safety leaflets to be circulated to the public in April. [10554]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Details of the planned British Standard on carbon monoxide detectors will be incorporated in the safety leaflets on the dangers of carbon monoxide to be circulated to the public in April, unless the Department receives information that the publication date of this standard will be significantly delayed.

Business Links

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of Board of Trade if he will list for each existing Business Link the members of its board, indicating which firm they work for and how many people that firm employs. [10416]

Mr. Page: The information requested is not available. It could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Shipbuilding Intervention Fund

Mr. Congdon: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the level of grants under the shipbuilding intervention fund. [11219]

Mr. Eggar: As I announced to the House on 20 December, the EC shipbuilding regime laid down by the seventh directive will continue until the OECD shipbuilding agreement enters into force, or until 30 September 1996 at the latest.

Following a decision of the European Commission, I have decided that the maximum level of support for this period from the shipbuilding intervention fund shall continue to be 9 per cent. for large ships. This is inclusive of the shipbuilders' tax relief of 2 per cent.

I have similarly decided that the maximum level for small ships from 1 January for this period shall continue to be 4.5 per cent. This is inclusive of shipbuilders' tax relief. These levels are the maximum permitted by the EC shipbuilding regime.

The OECD agreement is due to come into force by 15 July 1996. When it comes into force, support from the shipbuilding intervention fund and equivalent support in other signatory countries, will be terminated. Shipbuilders' tax relief in respect of merchant ships will be terminated at the same time.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Youth Work Funding

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what will be the level of funding of youth work in Northern Ireland next year; what was the expenditure in the current financial year; and if he will make a statement. [8640]

Mr. Ancram: Funding figures for 1996–97 allocations to the youth service in Northern Ireland are subject to parliamentary approval. It is anticipated that there will be a rise in the budget of the Youth Council for Northern Ireland of 2.5 per cent. on the planning figure of £2,161,000 for 1995–96.

Funding for the youth service in Northern Ireland is also included within the block grant allocations of the local education and library boards. The determination of the levels of funding and allocation of these funds rests with the individual boards.

The Government have also agreed to provide additional funding for youth organisations under the European Union special initiative for peace and reconciliation. A sum in the region of 5 million ECU for the intermediary funding body for the youth sector has been included in the operational programme. The Government will provide additional funds to meet up to 25 per cent. of the total cost of projects funded under this initiative.

Further and Higher Education

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has for capital expenditure on further education in Belfast. [8641]

Mr. Ancram: Further education projects such as that planned at the Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education compete with projects in other sectors for a place in the annual capital new starts programme. The 1996–97 programme, which will be announced shortly, will be constructed from schemes with a high priority which are sufficiently advanced in planning within the total education estate.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what will be the level of the funding of higher education in Northern Ireland in 1996–97; what was the expenditure in 1995–96; and if he will make a statement on the impact of the settlement on the unit of resource in higher education. [8639]

Mr. Ancram: The Department of Education for Northern Ireland is advised on the funding of the two Northern Ireland universities by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. It will be some weeks yet before HEFCE is in a position to advise the Department on the levels of funding for the 1996–97 academic year. Until the funding allocations are known, it is not possible to assess the impact on the unit of resource.

Total recurrent and capital funding to the Northern Ireland universities in the 1995–96 academic year will amount to some £117 million.

Union Flag

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the Royal Ulster Constabulary divisional station in the city of Armagh has been provided with a Union flag; what advice has been issued to the Royal Ulster Constabulary of the days on which the Union flag should be flown; for what reasons the Union flag is not flown on such days at Armagh Royal Ulster Constabulary station; and if arrangements will be made to fly the Union flag at this Royal Ulster Constabulary station. [9208]

Sir John Wheeler: The Union flag is flown over all RUC buildings, including Armagh RUC station, in accordance with RUC instructions. These instructions require that the flag be flown from 8 am to sunset on 19 specified occasions throughout the year. Armagh RUC station has been provided with a flag for this purpose.

Grant-maintained Integrated Schools

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the target numbers for enrolment at each grant-maintained integrated school in Northern Ireland;

and which of these schools have reached their target number. [9306]

Mr. Ancram: Development proposals for new grant-maintained integrated schools are expected to demonstrate the potential for minimum enrolments of 100 pupils in primary schools after about seven years of operation and 300 pupils in secondary schools after about five years of operation. All new schools that have been in existence for these periods have in fact exceeded these minimum figures.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what is the present religious composition of pupils in the enrolment at each grant-maintained integrated school in Northern Ireland; [9307]

(2) on what basis pupils enrolled at grant-maintained integrated schools in Northern Ireland are defined as Protestant or Roman Catholic. [9308]

Mr. Ancram: Parents of pupils attending grant-maintained integrated schools are required to declare the religion of their children to schools. This information is included in the annual school census return.

The present religious composition of pupils in the enrolment of each grant maintained integrated school is as follows:

School	*Protestant pupils*	*Roman catholic pupils*	*Other pupils*	*Total*
Primary				
Acorn	45	33	2	80
Braidside	40	31	78	149
Bridge	111	138	8	257
Corran	46	48	6	100
Cranmore	27	34	19	80
Enniskillen	64	96	26	186
Hazelwood IPS	117	149	68	334
Lough View	25	18	8	51
Millstrand	62	51	70	183
Oakgrove IPS	99	141	22	262
Omagh	42	63	19	124
Portadown	50	73	28	151
Saints and Scholars	29	41	4	74
Windmill	59	61	13	133
Secondary				
Erne College	15	43	3	61
Hazelwood College	205	370	61	636
Lagan College	417	403	97	917
Oakgrove	87	174	19	280
Shimna College	13	45	2	60

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish details of the total public expenditure to date allocated to grant-maintained integrated schools in Northern Ireland. [9209]

Mr. Ancram: Allocations from 1991–92 to date total £11.8 million for capital expenditure and £36.4 million for recurrent expenditure.

Hospices (National Lottery)

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the impact of the national lottery on raising funds to support the development and operation of the hospice movement and hospices; what plans he has to ensure the financial security of hospices; and if he will make a statement. [9283]

Mr. Moss: We have not made any assessment of the impact of the national lottery on the fund-raising activities of the hospices in Northern Ireland. We understand that the National Council for Hospice and Palliative Care Services is keeping this matter under review. To help ensure the financial security of hospices, health and social services boards have been asked to enter into contracts for the purchase of hospice services.

Electricity Interconnector

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of the electricity needs of Northern Ireland it is expected will be provided by the interconnector with Scotland if it is fully operational. [9374]

Mr. Ancram: Under the terms of the agreement entered into between Northern Ireland Electricity plc and Scottish Power plc approximately 20 per cent. of the demand on the Northern Ireland electricity system will be met by the interconnector, when fully operational.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations have been received about the threat to the proposed electricity interconnector from munitions dumped around Beaufort's dyke. [9375]

Mr. Ancram: None. The Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Departments published on 8 January 1996 an interim report on the recent survey of the Beaufort's dyke munitions disposal site and surrounding areas. Further survey work will be carried out.

Disability

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what guidance he intends to issue to *(a)* Departments, *(b)* executive agencies, *(c)* non-departmental public bodies and *(d)* outside bodies and arm's-length organisations which he has responsibility for, or an interest in, regarding the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if he will make a statement; [9229]

(2) what guidance he intends to issue to local authorities about the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if he will make a statement; [9247]

(3) what guidance he intends to issue to health authorities and trusts about the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if he will make a statement. [9243]

Mr. Moss: In Northern Ireland, the Training and Employment Agency is currently consulting on a draft code of practice relating to the employment provisions in the Act and statutory guidance related to the definition of disability. Consultation on proposals for regulations under the employment and definition provisions of the Act is also currently underway. The Department of Health and Social Services will be asking the Northern Ireland Disability Council, when it first meets, to produce and consult a code of practice relating to the rights of access to goods and services. The Department of Health and Social

Services will also be consulting on associated regulations. All these items will be published in plenty of time to allow employers and service providers in Northern Ireland to prepare themselves for the introduction of the new rights and duties. I will ensure that Northern Ireland Departments and any bodies for which they are responsible will be made aware of their responsibilities under the Act.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures are in place to ensure that the inaccessibility of school transport is not a restricting factor in integrating disabled children into mainstream schools; and if he will make a statement. [9249]

Mr. Ancram: Where an education and library board maintains a statement of special educational needs in respect of a pupil, the board has the statutory duty under article 31 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 to arrange for the special educational provision specified in the statement to be made. Where a board considered that it was necessary to make arrangements for home-to-school transport to enable a pupil to benefit from special educational provision, it would specify these in the statement also. If ordinary bus services were not accessible to the child concerned, alternative suitable arrangements would be made, for example by using taxi services or by securing a place on a specially adapted bus. These arrangements would apply whether the special educational provision were being provided at a special school or a mainstream school.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his Department's policy in relation to the development of sports for disabled people. [9290]

Mr. Ancram: My Department's policy in this regard is based on the 1989 publication, "Building on Ability". The principles of this publication have been enshrined in a policy framework document prepared by the NI Sports Council in 1993 on sport for people with disability.

SCOTLAND

Tuberculosis Vaccination

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the number of BCG vaccinations delivered to school children will, on current trends, reach the level recorded in *(a)* 1985 and *(b)* 1980; and if he will make a statement. [7367]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Current practice is to provide tuberculin testing for school children aged around 12. Where the test is negative, BCG vaccination is offered. Figures published by the Registrar General for Scotland show that the number of 12-year-olds declined substantially over the period between 1980 and 1994. In consequence, the number of vaccinations has also decreased and, on current trends, the number of children vaccinated is unlikely, in the foreseeable future, to reach the levels recorded in these earlier years. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, which advises Health Ministers on vaccination issues, is reviewing the current arrangements for BCG testing and vaccination in schools and its recommendations, when available, will be carefully considered. Data on population, testing and vaccination in the years 1980, 1985 and 1994 are given in the following table.

	Estimated population of 12 year olds	*Number of shcoolchildren[1] tested*	*Number of schoolchildren testing negative[2]*	*Number of schoolchildren[3] vaccinated*	*Percentage of schoolchildren[3] vaccinated*
1980	87,067	83,165	74,147	72,422	97.7
1985	71,924	79,001	71,377	69,562	97.5
1994	65,054	57,725	53,754	51,785	96.3

[1] Figures may include children other than aged 12 where, for instance, testing focuses on school classes rather than age specifically.
[2] i.e. without natural immunity.
[3] Only children testing negative are vaccinated. Figure therefore excludes those who tested positive and who for any other reason, such as parental request, were not vaccinated.

Clinical Outcomes

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what work his Department is currently undertaking on health service clinical outcomes; and what plans he has to publish comparative data on clinical outcomes in each NHS trust and health board area in Scotland. [9202]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A report updating and refining the outcome indicators published in December 1994 will be published next month. A further report containing new indicators is planed for publication later in the year.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of state for Scotland if he will publish the target figure in monetary terms for the return on capital for each NHS trust annually since their inception and the actual return as capital annually; and how much of the actual surplus was *(a)* retained by the NHS trusts and *(b)* returned to the Government. [7366]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is set out in the table and was taken from NHS trust accounts for financial years 1992–93, 1993–94 and 1994–95.

Return on capital for 1992–93

£000

Trust name	*Target return*	*Actual return*	*Retained by trust*	*Returned*
Aberdeen Royal Hospitals NHS Trust	7,503	8,580	2,707	5,873
South Ayrshire Hospitals NHS Trust	2,900	3,011	480	2,531
Total	10,403	11,591	3,187	8,404

Return on capital for 1993–94

£000

Trust name	Target return	Actual return	Retained by trust	Returned
Aberdeen Royal Hospitals NHS Trust	7,620	7,027	696	6,331
Ayrshire and Arran Community Healthcare NHS Trust	3,123	3,037	1,021	2,016
Caithness and Sutherland NHS Trust	922	960	319	641
Dundee Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	7,223	7,231	1,284	5,947
Grampian Healthcare NHS Trust	10,024	10,675	3,546	7,129
Monklands and Bellshills Hospitals NHS Trust	2,481	2,766	904	1,862
Moray Health Services NHS Trust	1,225	1,339	354	985
North Ayrshire and Arran NHS Trust	4,671	4,639	1,593	3,046
Raigmore Hospital NHS Trust	3,026	3,570	1,171	2,399
Royal Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust	3,670	3,807	1,114	2,693
Royal Scottish National Hospital NHS Trust	1,636	2,194	975	1,219
South Ayrshire Hospitals NHS Trust	2,864	3,068	727	2,341
Southern General Hospitals NHS Trust	3,489	4,020	1,106	2.914
Stirling Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	2,481	2,570	899	1,671
Victoria Infirmary NHS Trust	2,657	2,556	526	2,030
West Lothian NHS Trust	5,615	5,749	1,612	4,137
Yorkhill NHS Trust	2,274	2,151	601	1,550
Total	65,001	67,359	18,448	48,911

Return on capital for 1994–95

£000

Trust name	Target return	Actual return	Retained by trust	Returned
Aberdeen Royal Hospitals NHS Trust	8,024	7,977	1,466	6,511
Angus NHS Trust	2,588	2,601	896	1,705
Ayrshire and Arran Community Healthcare NHS Trust	3,271	3,272	883	2,389
Caithness and Sutherland NHS Trust	973	1,005	319	686
Central Scotland Healthcare NHS Trust	3,659	3,699	214	3,485
Dumfries and Galloway Acute and Maternity Hospitals NHS Trust	1,613	1,456	433	1,023
Dundee Healthcare NHS Trust	3,168	3,213	1,120	2,093
Dundee Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	7.074	5,603	990	4,613
East & Midlothian NHS Trust	3,503	3,537	1,215	2,322
Edinburgh Healthcare NHS Trust	6,262	6,682	2,332	4,350
Edinburgh Sick Childrens' NHS Trust	663	682	230	452
Falkirk and District Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	2,290	2,593	985	1,608
Fife Healthcare NHS Trust	3,798	3,859	1,365	2,494
Glasgow Royal Infirmary University NHS Trust	7,499	8.003	2,559	5,444
Grampian Healthcare NHS Trust	10,564	10,806	2,799	8,007
Greater Glasgow Community and Mental Health Services NHS Trust	7,922	7,925	1,701	6,224
Hairmyres and Stonehouse Hospitals NHS Trust	2,876	2,816	625	2,191
Highland Communities NHS Trust	3,061	3,025	592	2,433
Inverclyde Royal NHS Trust	1,872	1,989	699	1,290
Kirkcaldy Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	2,145	2,187	731	1,456
Law Hospital NHS Trust	1,907	2,133	877	1,256
Monklands and Bellshill Hospitals NHS Trust	2,552	2,557	936	1,621
Moray Health Services NHS Trust	1,779	1,786	139	1,647
North Ayrshire and Arran NHS Trust	4,913	4,957	1,713	3,244
Perth and Kinross Healthcare NHS Trust	4,380	4,449	1,449	3,000
Queen Margaret Hospital NHS Trust	4,014	4,017	1,292	2.725
Raigmore Hospital NHS Trust	3,120	3,119	815	2,304
Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS Trust	4,058	4,276	1,634	2,642
Royal Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust	3,654	3,781	860	2,921
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh NHS Trust	8,541	8,636	2,850	5,786
South Ayrshire Hospital NHS Trust	2,921	2,923	516	2,407
Southern General Hospital NHS Trust	3,846	3,845	1,345	2,500
Stirling Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	2,564	2,680	824	1,856
Stobhill NHS Trust	3,548	3,559	1,190	2,369
Victoria Infirmary NHS Trust	2,621	2,474	(5,646)	[1]—
West Glasgow Hospitals University NHS Trust	5,940	6,330	2,233	4,097
West Lothian NHS Trust	5,633	5,559	989	4,570
Western General Hospitals NHS Trust	4,783	4,789	1,061	3,728
Yorkhill NHS Trust	2,509	2,636	925	1,711
Total	156,109	157,436	38,156	111,160

[1] Deficit due to loss on disposal of fixed assets.

1. Figures for Central Scotland Healthcare NHS Trust include those for Royal Scottish National Hospital NHS Trust which dissolved on formation of the new Trust on 1 October 1995.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action heads of his Department's executive agencies are taking to safeguard the provision of pre-retirement courses; and if he will make a statement. [9140]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The heads of the Scottish Office executive agencies recognise the importance of providing effective support for staff about to retire. The method used to provide that support can vary from agency to agency and is a matter for each chief executive, but many of them use facilities provided through the Scottish Office.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which capital projects are currently being considered under the private finance initiative; and what is the cost of each project. [9031]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The following projects are the subject of negotiation or are expected to be put out to tender soon:

Project	*Estimated capital value (£ million)*
Highland Regional Council: Fort William/Inverness sewage treatment scheme	45.0
Edinburgh Healthcare NHS Trust: Ferryfield house: elderly beds	2.0
Greater Glasgow Community and Mental Health Services Trust: Stobhill Hospital: acute mental health beds	7.4
Hairmyres and Stonehouse NHS Trust: new hospital	70.0
Law Hospital NHS Trust: health information system	2.5
Perth and Kinross Healthcare NHS Trust: health information system	2.5
Dundee District Council: Baldovie waste to energy facility	40.0
Grampian Health Board: Stonehaven health services	3.8
Law Hospital NHS Trust: new hospital	120.0
M6 completion	[1]10.0
Ayrshire and Arran Community Health Trust: East Ayrshire health services	8.0
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh NHS Trust: new hospital	140.0
Western General Hospital NHS Trust (Edinburgh): new hospital	95.0

[1] Estimated value of remaining Scottish section.

Six projects are currently in progress, contracts have been let. These are all in the health sector and have a total estimated capital value of £22.9 million.

Scottish Homes (Transfers)

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the scope of his announcement that local authorities will now be able to bid for Scottish Homes properties which were earmarked for transfer. [9252]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities proposal that local authorities should be able to bid more widely for Scottish Homes stock was included in the consultation paper, "Devolution of Power to Councils", which was issued on 29 December and is currently the subject of consultation. Until a decision is taken following the responses to the consultation exercise, the current policy will continue to be applied.

Electricity Interconnector

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representation he has received concerning the need for an inquiry into the undersea section of the proposed electricity interconnector with Northern Ireland; what response he has given; and if he will make a statement. [9320]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend has received one such representation. This was passed to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport in view of his responsibilities under section 34 of the Coast Protection Act 1949.

Disability

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his latest assessment of the impact of local government reorganisation on the provision of services for disabled people; what guidelines he *(a)* has issued and *(b)* intends to issue to unitary authorities on the provision of services for and to disabled people; what arrangements he intends to put in place to ensure the continuation of services which are currently provided across the new local government authority boundaries; and if he will make a statement. [9236]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The new local government arrangements will allow authorities the flexibility to establish procedures and structures to secure the efficient and effective delivery of social work services for people with disabilities in response to local needs and circumstances.

The Government have been determined to ensure a smooth transition to the new arrangements. As part of the community care planning process for 1995–98, local authorities were asked to identify both current and planned services within the new local authorities' boundaries. This will ensure that the new authorities have an informed insight on current strategic thinking and the pattern of services in their areas. The recently produced booklet "Managing Social Work Services in the Future", was distributed widely to both old and new authorities to ensure that elected members were fully aware of their authorities' responsibilities for the provision of social work services. The new authorities are also being provided with a complete package of up-dated guidance and directions on the community care arrangements.

With regard to the provision of services across the new local authority boundaries, authorities will continue to be able to contract with independent sector providers in other areas. Section 58 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1994 clarified authorities's powers with regard to purchasing services from other authorities.

Authorities also already have available procedures to allow them to enter joint arrangements with other authorities or independent sector organisations in consortia to develop specialist services.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures are in place to ensure that the inaccessibility of school transport is not a restricting factor in integrating disabled children into mainstream schools; and if he will make a statement. [9257]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The provision of school transport is a matter for education authorities who have certain statutory duties, in addition to wide powers, to make appropriate arrangements in respect of disabled children who are attending mainstream schools.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to ensure that disabled people are represented on the health boards and health councils which he is responsible for appointing; and if he will make a statement. [9361]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A number of disabled people already serve in a non-executive capacity on health boards and NHS trusts and their contribution brings a necessary and important perspective to the boards to which they are appointed. Invitations to serve as non-executives are sought from a wide range of community, voluntary and health groups together with press advertisements to ensure the broadest range of community membership is available for health boards and NHS trusts.

Responsibility for appointments to health councils rests with local health boards, who are encouraged to seek a broad representation of members appointed to serve on health councils.

Scots Language

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has made representations to the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys concerning a question on the Scots language being included in the 2001 census; and if he will make a statement. [9383]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Registrar General for Scotland is currently canvassing the views of a number of individuals and organisations with an interest in the Scots language. It will be some time before a decision will be taken on the merits and practicality of including a question on Scots in the census.

Incontinence Pads

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his policy on the supply of incontinence pads to those who require them because of disability; what plans he has to review these arrangements; and if he will make a statement. [9213]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In Scotland, general practitioners are able to prescribe incontinence pads. A range of incontinence pads is included in the Scottish drug tariff. There are no current plans to review these arrangements.

Autism

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the services available to *(a)* children and *(b)* adults with autism; and what plans he has to enhance these services. [9253]

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: Local social work, education and health authorities are responsible for determining and responding to the social, educational and health care needs of children with autism. The Scottish Office has commissioned a research project on the incidence of autism among children in Scotland and the current education provision for autistic pupils. The project will draw on experience through the UK in considering which types of educational approaches are most appropriate for children with autism. With regard to adults with autism, under the community care arrangements, local authority social work departments, in conjunction with health and housing authorities, are responsible for assessing the requirement for care services to meet the needs of vulnerable adults living in the community. Local authorities are well funded to meet these responsibilities and must establish their priorities for service development and resource allocation in response to local circumstances.

Carers

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to ensure that carers are represented on the health boards and health councils which he is responsible for appointing; and if he will make a statement. [9365]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Invitations to serve as non-executives on health boards and NHS trusts are sought from a wide range of community, voluntary and health groups, a number of whom will represent the interests of carers. Invitations are also made by press advertisements to ensure that the broadest range of community membership of health boards and NHS trusts is available.

Responsibility for appointments to health councils rests with local health boards, who are similarly encouraged to ensure that a broad representation of community interests is available through the appointment of members.

National Lottery

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the impact of the national lottery on raising funds to support the development and operation of the hospice movement and hospices; what plans he has to ensure the financial security of hospices; and if he will make a statement. [9280]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There is as yet no conclusive evidence about the impact of the national lottery on the fund-raising activities of the adult voluntary hospices in Scotland. The Scottish Office will keep in close contact with the Scottish Partnership Agency for Palliative and Cancer Care, which will continue to keep this matter under review. Two hospices have already benefited from the national lottery fund, and we have given an assurance that such funding can be treated independently of the hospices' income from their contracts with health boards.

When my right hon. Friend met representatives of the hospice movement on 21 December 1995 to discuss a number of issues, including finance, he reaffirmed his view that hospices should be able to expect to receive around half of their running cost income through their

contracts with health boards; and he recognised the benefits of longer contracts in increasing their financial security.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent assessment he has made of the impact of the introduction of the national lottery upon the fund-raising efforts of charities and voluntary organisations in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [9286]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There is, as yet, no conclusive evidence concerning the impact of the national lottery on the fund-raising activities of charities and voluntary organisations. However, the Government have given a commitment to monitor charitable income, and The Scottish Office is associated with a Home Office research project which will analyse and monitor changes in charitable income, following the introduction of the national lottery.

Gateside School for the Deaf

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the future of the services provided by Gateside school for the deaf to *(a)* children in the new Renfrewshire council's area and *(b)* other unitary authorities. [9371]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: It will be for the new Renfrewshire council and for the two other councils whose areas are currently served by staff based at Gateside school to determine how to discharge their statutory duties in respect of children belonging to their areas who have special educational needs arising from hearing impairment.

Greater Glasgow Health Board

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the rate of medical accidents and hospital acquired infections, injuries and fatalities in the Greater Glasgow health board area in each year since 1979. [9543]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: With the exception of 1979, for which year comparable figures are not available centrally, (i) the number of discharges after medical accidents and (ii) the number of deaths after medical accidents are shown in the tables.

(i) Greater Glasgow Health Board: Discharges after Medical Accidents, 1980–1995[1]

	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
Misadventures to patients during surgical and medical care[2]	50	38	37	57	47	62	5	11
Drugs, medicaments and biological substances causing adverse effects in therapeutic use[3]	344	382	380	445	452	503	465	394
Total	394	420	417	502	499	565	470	405

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*[1]
Misadventures to patients during surgical and medical care[2]	13	7	12	38	76	54	91	87
Drugs, medicaments and biological substances causing adverse effects in therapeutic use[3]	551	444	454	609	509	549	633	534
Total	564	451	466	647	585	603	724	621

[1] 1995 data provisional.
[2] These figures include: (a) hospital acquired infections but exclude: (b) accidental overdoses of drugs and cases where the wrong drug was given in error (c) surgical and medical procedures as the cause of abnormal reactions by the patient, without mention of misadventure at the time of the procedure.
[3] These figures include: (a) correct drug properly administered in therapeutic or prophylactic dosage, as the cause of any adverse effect but exclude (b) accidental overdose of drugs and cases where the wrong drug was given in error (c) administration with suicidal or homicidal intent.

(ii) Greater Glasgow Health Board: deaths from medical accidents, 1980–1994

	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
Misadventures to patients during surgical and medical care[1]	1	—	—	—	1	1	2	1
Drugs, medicaments and biological substances causing adverse effects in therapeutic use[2]	2	4	4	2	—	—	4	2
Total	3	4	4	2	1	1	6	3

	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Misadventures to patients during surgical and medical care[1]	—	—	—	1	2	2	1
Drugs, medicaments and biological substances causing adverse effects in therapeutic use[2]	1	—	3	2	2	8	2
Total	1	—	3	3	4	10	3

[1] These figures include: (a) hospital acquired infections but exclude: (b) accidental overdoses of drugs and cases where the wrong drug was given in error (c) surgical and medical procedures as the cause of abnormal reactions by the patient, without mention of misadventure at the time of the procedure.

[2] These figures include: (a) correct drug properly administered in therapeutic or prophylactics dosage, as the cause of any adverse effect but exclude: (b) accidental overdose of drug and cases where the wrong drug was given in error (c) administration with suicidal or homicidal intent.

Over the same period the number of in-patients and day cases in the Greater Glasgow health board area rose by 35 per cent. from 183,178 to 248,129.

Scottish Office Pensions Agency

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has for the privatisation of the Scottish Office Pensions Agency; and if he will make a statement. [10105]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* I have no plans to privatise the agency.

TRANSPORT

Goods and Public Service Vehicle Drivers

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in how many instances in the last five years an applicant for goods vehicle and public service vehicle licence has received a licence despite having a criminal record. [10192]

Mr. Norris: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what steps he is taking to ensure that schools and local education authorities check school bus drivers' credentials, including any criminal convictions, with the police; [10190]

(2) what steps he is taking to improve liaison between the police, schools and local education authorities concerning checking applications for school bus drivers and similar positions. [10191]

Mr. Norris: Individual schools and local education authorities are responsible for checking the credentials of all those who work with children in their charge and for appropriate liaison with police forces.

Road Rage

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what plans he has to introduce psychological counselling for road rage; and if he will make a statement; [9917]

(2) what proposals he has to combat road rage by psychological counselling. [9918]

Mr. Norris: The courts may impose a probation or combination order on an offender, who is supervised by a probation officer required to assess the offender's motivations, pattern of offending and relevant problems and devise a supervision programme designed to address them. This can include mandatory or voluntary counselling and treatment where the offender has reacted inappropriately to a situation on the road. Consideration is being given to whether anything further needs to be done.

MOTs

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to review the need to issue annual reminders to motorists to have MOTs as part of his policy to reduce pollution from cars; and if he will make a statement. [10412]

Mr. Norris: We have no plans to review the need for mandatory annual MOT reminders. I believe that the benefits would be minimal: motorists already receive an annual vehicle excise duty reminder and cannot at that stage relicense their vehicles without a current MOT test certificate.

We are, however, exploring in the context of MOT computerisation the matter of garages being able voluntarily to issue MOT reminders.

TREASURY

Profit-related Pay Schemes

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer that proposals he has for *(a)* reviewing and *(b)* improving profit-related pay schemes. [8310]

Mr. Jack: The operation of this tax relief is kept under regular review. Action is taken when necessary to ensure that the relief continues to meet its policy objectives.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the amount per week a married couple with two children on average male earnings is estimated to have paid in VAT, at today's prices, in the year 1978–79; and what he estimates a similar family will pay in 1995–96. [8530]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: A married couple with two children on average earnings paid VAT of £7.36 per week in 1978–79, in 1995–96 prices, and an estimated £21.40 in 1995–96. Since 1978–79, the real take-home pay of such a family has risen by £80 per week.

Private Finance Initiative

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list and give full details of all applications for

capital schemes from the west midlands region seeking PFI approval for 1994–95 and 1995–96; and in each case *(a)* which have been approved, *(b)* which are still awaiting approval and *(c)* which were originally the subject of bids for full funding from Treasury. [9205]

Mr. Jack: Full details of applications for capital schemes from the west midlands region could be provided only at disproportionate cost, due to the diverse numbers of organisations involved with PFI throughout the public sector.

Live Creatures and Plants (Customs Seizures)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the seizure of live animals and birds by HM Customs and Excise in each of the last three years. [8779]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The numbers of live animals and birds seized by HM Customs and Excise in the last three years for breach of the endangered species controls are as follows:

	1993	*1994*	*1995*[1]
Animals	313	1,036	2,034
Birds	2,503	120	53

[1] To end September.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many prosecutions were entered into as a result of seizure of live creatures and plants by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in each of the last three years. [8780]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: There have been five prosecutions in the last three years, all of them successful.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has *(a)* read, collated or received and *(b)* authorised civil servants or any other person to read, collate or receive copies of draft sections of Sir Richard Scott's report circulated by Sir Richard Scott to Government Ministers, civil servants and other persons. [10213]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* The handling of extracts of Sir Richard Scott's draft report, subject to guidance from the inquiry, is for those to whom they are sent. The Government do not disclose details of correspondence between the inquiry and individual witnesses.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total cost of salaries since 1992 paid to persons in Her Majesty's Customs and Excise employed on a part-time or full-time basis in any connection in relation to the Scott inquiry. [10211]

Mr. Clarke *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* The staff costs of officials within HM Customs and Excise wholly employed on matters relating to the Scott inquiry since 1992 are approximately £443,000. The total staffing costs to date of the Department's Scott inquiry unit are estimated to be around £720,000. This does not include the unquantifiable costs of current and former Customs and Excise officials who acted as witnesses to the Scott inquiry who have been involved on an ad hoc basis.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a breakdown of the spending by his Department or by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise on external advice in relation to the Scott inquiry, including how much has been spent on legal advice and for whom. [10212]

Mr. Clarke *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* The amount so far spent by the Treasury on external advice in relation to Sir Richard Scott's inquiry is £2,468. Some £60,440 has been spent by HM Customs and Excise on external legal advice both for witnesses who are Customs officials and for independent counsel involved in the cases considered by the inquiry. The names of the individuals and their legal advisors are confidential to them.

Self-employed People

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from self-employed people and their organisations in respect of his recent Budget proposals; what has been the nature of such representations; and if he will make a statement. [8561]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has received a number of representations since the Budget, but it would not be practicable to identify separately those from self-employed people. The income tax measures in the Budget will cut tax for some 3 million self-employed taxpayers. The introduction of self-assessment will greatly simplify the current outdated and complex rules for taxation of the self-employed.

HEALTH

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many incidents of carbon monoxide poisoning annually resulting in death and injury involve *(a)* persons over the age of 60 years and *(b)* students and persons under the age of 25 years. [9718]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have been asked to reply.

The estimated annual average UK totals over the latest five years for non-fatal accidental carbon monoxide poisonings from all causes, but excluding work-related accidents, are as follows:

Age	*Total*
Under 25 years	272
Over 60 years	29

The annual average numbers over the latest five years of accidental carbon monoxide fatalities from all causes in England and Wales, again excluding work related-accidents, are as follows:

Age	*Total*
Under 25 years	28
Over 60 years	44

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many incidents of carbon monoxide poisoning resulting in deaths and injury annually are caused by *(a)* live fuel effect gas fires, *(b)* gas water heaters, *(c)* gas central heating, *(d)* other gas appliances, *(e)* live fuel effect liquid petroleum gas fires, *(f)* liquid petroleum gas water heaters, *(g)* liquid petroleum gas central heating, *(h)* other liquid gas petroleum appliances, *(i)* solid fuel fires, *(j)* solid fuel central heating, *(k)* oil-fired central heating boilers and *(l)* other agents. [9705]

Mr. Taylor: I have been asked to reply.

The estimated annual average UK totals for non-fatal accidental carbon monoxide poisonings from all causes, but excluding work-related accidents, are as follows:

	Number
Live-fuel effect gas fires	87
Gas water heaters	106
Gas central heating	19
Other gas appliances	n/a
Live fuel effect liquid petroleum gas fires	n/a
Liquid petroleum gas water heaters	n/a
Liquid petroleum gas central heating	n/a
Other liquid gas petroleum appliances	n/a
Solid fuel cooking ranges	51
Solid fuel fires	13
Solid fuel central heating	n/a
Oil-fired central heating boilers	n/a
Non-appliance-related accidents	169
Unknown source	85

n/a—No data available.

Coroners' returns of fatalities from carbon monoxide do not contain the degree of detail necessary for the categorisation specified in the question. However, the special report, "Poisoning by Carbon Monoxide from Domestic Heating Appliances", sponsored by the Department's consumer safety unit and published in 1995 by Metra-Martech Ltd., copies of which are available in the Library of the House, contains estimates of the annual totals of accidents and fatalities, classified separately by appliance and fuel type.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many incidents of carbon monoxide poisoning resulting in deaths and injury annually are caused by *(a)* natural gas, *(b)* liquid petroleum gas, *(c)* solid fuel, *(d)* domestic fuel oil and *(e)* other agents. [9719]

Mr. Taylor: I have been asked to reply.

The estimated annual average UK totals over the latest five years for non-fatal accidental carbon monoxide poisonings from all causes, but excluding work-related accidents, are as follows:

	Number
Natural gas	212
Liquid petroleum gas	[1]—
Solid fuel	64
Domestic fuel oil	[1]—
Other agents	[1]—

[1] No accidents registered on the Home Accident Surveillance System.

The annual averages over the latest five years for accidental carbon monoxide fatalities from all causes in England and Wales, again excluding work-related accidents, are as follows:

	Number
Natural gas	25
Liquid petroleum gas	3
Solid fuel	7
Domestic fuel oil	1
Unknown agents	10
Non-appliance-related	79

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many incidents of carbon monoxide poisoning resulting in deaths and injury there have been in the last 10 years. [9706]

Mr. Taylor: I have been asked to reply.

The number of accidental injuries owing to carbon monoxide poisoning in Great Britain from home heating appliances is estimated as follows:

1985: 215
1986: 161
1987: 176
1988: 53
1989: 130
1990: 128
1991: 228
1992: 244
1993: 105
1994: 211

Source: DTI report on Carbon Monoxide poisoning from Domestic Heating Appliances.

The comparable figures for accidental figures owing to carbon monoxide poisoning from non-appliance-related cases are:

1985: 151
1986: 101
1987: 59
1988: 309
1989: 74
1990: 110
1991: 285
1992: 89
1993: 42
1994: 273

The annual totals for fatalities from carbon monoxide poisoning from domestic heating appliances are:

1985: 16
1986: 76
1987: 52
1988: 39
1989: 42
1990: 46
1991: 51
1992: 50
1993: 31[1]
1994: 30[1]

Note:
[1]Flammable gas sources only.

The comparable figures for fatalities from carbon monoxide poisoning, from non-appliance-related cases, are:

1985: 22

1986: 249

1987: 95

1988: 122

1989: 54

1990: 102

1991: 35

1992: 30

1993: n/a

1994: n/a

Note:

n/a - No data available.

Residential Care Homes

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 19 December, *Official Report*, column *1134*, in what form information about residential geriatric beds is available. [8449]

Mr. Bowis: Information on the average daily number of available national health service beds, including those in wards classified as for the elderly is published in "Bed availability for England". Information on the number of beds in independent sector hospitals, nursing homes and clinics is published in "Private Hospitals, Homes and Clinics Registered under Section 23 of the Registered Homes Act 1994". Information on residential accommodation provided in staffed local authority accommodation, voluntary and private homes in England for elderly and for people who are physically or sensorily disabled is published in "Residential Accommodation for Elderly People and People with Physical and/or Sensory Disabilities". Copies of all these publications are available in the Library.

Disability

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidance he intends to issue to *(a)* Departments, *(b)* executive agencies, *(c)* non-departmental public bodies and *(d)* outside bodies and arm's-length organisations which he has responsibility for, or an interest in, regarding the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if he will make a statement. [9219]

(2) what guidance he intends to issue to health authorities and trusts about the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if he will make a statement. [9241]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my hon. Friend the Minister for Disabled People gave to him on 15 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *417*. I will ensure that my Department and any bodies for which it is responsible will be made aware of their responsibilities under the Act.

Autism

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the services available to *(a)* children and *(b)* adults with autism; and what plans he has to enhance these services. [9254]

Mr. Bowis: Health and local authorities are responsible for the provision and development of appropriate services in their areas in the light of departmental guidance, "The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 6 Children with Disabilities", LAC(92)15 and HSG(92)42, copies of which are available in the Library. We are also funding a number of projects through the voluntary sector which will heighten awareness of the needs of people with autism and assist in the development of services.

Hormone Replacement Therapy

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies his Department is undertaking into links between hormone replacement therapy and breast cancer. [9490]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health is currently discussing research into the long-term effects of hormone replacement therapy with the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant in aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Psychiatric Nurses

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses working in psychiatric areas in the community per thousand population were employed by the NHS in *(a)* south Birmingham, *(b)* north Birmingham in the most recent five years for which figures are available. [9400]

Mr. Bowis: The information is shown in the table.

NHS hospital and community health services nursing and midwifery staff working within the community psychiatric nursing areas of work, excluding senior nurses and agency staff—by South Birmingham and North Birmingham district health authorities as at 30 September each year

Per 1,000 head of population	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
South Birmingham DHA[1]	0.134	0.131	0.127	0.138	0.140
North Birmingham DHA[2]	0.049	0.056	0.061	0.061	0.125

Notes

[1] The figure for 1990 includes data for Central Birmingham DHA which merged with South Birmingham in 1991 to form the current South Birmingham DHA.

[2] The figures for 1990 to 1993 includes data for East Birmingham DHA and West Birmingham DHA which merged with North Birmingham DHA to form the current North Birmingham DHA.

Community psychiatric nursing figures include qualified, unqualified and "other" nursing staff working within community psychiatric nursing area of work.

All nursing data are rounded to the nearest 10 whole-time equivalents.

Calculations are based on unrounded figures.

Source:

Nursing figures: Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census.

Population figures: Office of Public Census and Surveys 1994 Mid-year estimates.

Prescriptions (Sheffield)

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prescriptions were issued in Sheffield health authority for each of the last three years; and what was the total cost for each year. [9544]

Mr. Malone: The figures relating to prescriptions written by general practitioners in Sheffield family health services authority and dispensed anywhere in England are shown in the table.

Year	*Number of Items*	*Cost in NIC £*
1992–93	5,239,217	31,052,082
1993–94	5,597,739	34,109,947
1994–95	5,792,733	37,224,212

NIC="Net Ingredient Cost"—ie the cost of the drug excluding container costs and any discount obtained by the dispenser.

Emergency Service

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many emergency patients were transported more than 50 miles to receive hospital treatment in each month of 1995; and how many have subsequently died. [9825]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally.

NHS Chairmen and Non-executive Directors

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a list of current NHS chairmen and non-executive directors and the posts previously held by them. [9905]

Mr. Malone: A list of all appointments to national health service authorities and trusts will be published in the summer. It is not intended to include details of appointees' previous NHS posts.

Probity Audits

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of NHS audit activity was devoted to probity audits in *(a)* 1985 and *(b)* 1995. [9835]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally.

Executive Directors (Severance)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if NHS trusts are required to obtain the approval of the NHS executive before agreeing severance settlements for executive directors. [9836]

Mr. Malone: No. The guidance TEL(94)3 does not require trusts to submit information regarding compensation payments to directors.

Trainee Nurses

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to increase the number of nurses in training. [9837]

Mr. Horam: It is for local employers to determine the work force required to deliver the services that they have contracted to provide. They do this in the context of annual planning guidance issued by the National Health Service Executive, which maintains a national overview.

Paracetamol

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to ensure the safety of the current formulation of paracetamol. [9910]

Mr. Malone: The current formulation of paracetamol is safe when the recommended dose is not exceeded. Labelling regulations require that all packs instruct the patient not to exceed the recommended dose, which is clearly stated. Legislation restricts the number of tablets in a pack that can be bought without a pharmacist's supervision.

Attention Deficit Disorder

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those university teaching hospitals, medical colleges and other institutions involved in the training of medical doctors, indicating which of them include in their courses training in attention deficit disorder. [9017]

Mr. Malone: Each university medical school in the United Kingdom is responsible for setting its own undergraduate medical curriculum. It does so in the light of recommendations from the education committee of the General Medical Council which has the statutory responsibility for determining the skills and knowledge required for the granting of primary medical qualifications in the UK. Information on each medical school's curriculum is not available centrally.

The medical royal colleges are responsible for determining the content of postgraduate and continuing medical education programmes for qualified doctors. The Royal College of Psychiatrists is currently responsible for accreditation of postgraduate training schemes in child psychiatry and aims to ensure that all trainee psychiatrists receive a broad training in all relevant assessment and treatment interventions which would include the assessment and management of attention deficit disorder.

Epilepsy

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated in the last five years into the effects on drivers who suffer from epilepsy of light emitting diodes bicycle lights. [8618]

Mr. Bowis: None. The use of flashing LED bicycle lights is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

NHS Loto

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been received by the national health service from the NHS Loto *(a)* prior to and *(b)* since June 1995; and how much money has been spent. [8772]

Mr. Horam: NHS Loto is a lottery run independently of the Government, the Department of Health, and the national health service by Pascal and Company on behalf of the National Hospital Trust, a registered charity. I understand that 25 per cent. of the income of NHS Loto is given to the National Hospital Trust to donate to NHS hospitals. The trust makes substantial donations directly to NHS hospitals for specific projects and not via the Department of Health. The hon. Member may wish to contact the National Hospital Trust at No. 2 Centric house, Shoreditch high street, London E1 6JD for a list of donations.

Travel Vaccination

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is his Department's official policy regarding the provision of travel vaccines on the NHS; and if he is reviewing it; [9816]

(2) what plans he has to make a statement about travel vaccines on the NHS. [9817]

Mr. Horam: The position of successive Governments has been that immunisations against some infectious diseases are provided free for travellers as a matter of public health policy. This is the case for diseases where immunisation benefits not only the recipient but also the community at large by helping to prevent the spread of disease in the United Kingdom. Not all diseases covered by travel vaccines present a similar public health risk. Advice about possible risks, and measures which can be taken to avoid illness abroad, including travel vaccines, continues to be available free from general practitioners.

The Department of Health is currently considering the existing arrangements for travel vaccines in order to resolve the inconsistencies and ambiguities which have arisen over the years.

Hospital Bed Occupancy Rates

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines his Department provides on hospital bed occupancy rates. [9818]

Mr. Horam: None.

Young People (Secure Accommodation)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many young people *(a)* in total, *(b)* by age and *(c)* by gender were being held in local authority secure accommodation (i) on criminal grounds and (ii) on care grounds on the last date for which figures are available; [10147]

(2) how many young people were held in local authority secure accommodation on criminal grounds, in total; and how many of them were *(a)* on remand, *(b)* sentenced using section 53(2) of the Children and Young Persons Act 1993 and *(c)* on other grounds at the last date for which figures are available. [10148]

Mr. Bowis: The information requested is published in "Children accommodated in secure units during the year ending 31 March 1995, England, A/F 95/21", copies of which are available in the Library.

Drinking Water

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which is his policy as to the acceptable level of *(a)* salmonella campylobacter, *(b)* E. coli and *(c)* cryptosporidium in potable water. [10340]

Mr. Horam: Standards are laid down in legislation for faecal coliforms, which would include E. coli. The legislation also requires that water does not contain any organism at a concentration detrimental to public health. Water which meets legislative requirements for faecal coliforms indicator organisms is unlikely to contain salmonella or campylobacter. Research has shown that well operated treatment plants reduce cryptosporidium to very low levels. If cryptosporidium is detected, water companies, in discussion with local public health and environmental health officials, are responsible for making decisions.

Legionnaire's Disease, Turkey

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Public Health Laboratory Service was first informed about an outbreak of Legionnaire's disease in Kusadasi, Turkey. [10443]

Mr. Horam: The Public Health Laboratory Service will consider that there may be an outbreak of Legionnaire's disease among residents of the United Kingdom only when two or more reported cases appear to be linked. The PHLS first became aware of a second case of Legionnaire's disease in a resident of the UK, associated with a recent stay in Kusadasi, Turkey, on 11 August 1995.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library the report of the Public Health Laboratory Service into an outbreak of Legionnaire's disease in Kusadasi, Turkey, during 1995. [10444]

Mr. Horam: The report entitled, "Outbreak of Legionnaire's Disease Associated with the Hotel Imbat, Kusadasi, Turkey—Final Report and Recommendations from the Epidemiological, Environmental and Microbiological Investigations carried out by the PHLS in conjunction with the Turkish Representative of the European Working Group for Legionella Infections" is currently in preparation. Copies of this report will be placed in the Library.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in respect of which TECs she considers monitoring systems are *(a)* adequate and *(b)* inadequate. [10413]

Mr. Paice: The Department assigns financial risk banding to each training and enterprise council after assessing whether it complies with financial control provisions contained in the TEC operating agreement. These require TECs to monitor their own activities, and those of subcontractors, as well as meeting a range of obligations to young people and adults participating in training programmes.

These assessment do not cover TECs' private income nor any other internal financial matter which fall outside their contracts with Government. Financial control risk banding are reviewed quarterly, but individual TEC results are confidential.

The latest composite TEC risk banding results are for the quarter ended 30 September 1995, when all 74 English TECs fell within the Department's low risk band.

Tree People (Benefit Claims)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will ensure that her officials enforce the availability for work rule on benefit claimants living in trees near the Newbury bypass; and if she will make a statement. [10526]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. David Nicholson, dated 19 January 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about ensuring that officials enforce the availability for work rule on benefit claimants living in trees near the Newbury by-pass.

It may help if I explain that the receipt of unemployment benefits is conditional upon a person being available for and actively seeking employment. This means that they must be available to start work immediately; must not place such restrictions on the work they are willing to do which would leave them with no real prospects of finding a job and must take those steps, each week, which offer them their best prospects of obtaining work.

To satisfy the actively seeking employment condition, the steps an individual is required to take in any week are those which are reasonable in their case and which offer them their best prospects of receiving offers of employment. Steps may include applying for jobs, orally or in writing, looking in appropriate newspapers, trade magazines or other publications and following up possible job opportunities and canvassing employers. For the purposes of the actively seeking employment regulation, taking one step on a single occasion in a week is not enough to satisfy the condition unless that was all it was reasonable for the individual to do in that week.

The onus is on the claimant to show what steps they have taken to seek work. The legislation does not require written evidence but claimants are advised to keep records of their jobsearch to help them. Evidence can therefore be given orally or in writing and may include names and addresses of employers approached, copies of any written applications made and replies received, details of advertised vacancies which have been applied for, list of Jobcentres visited and job enquiries made.

I can assure you that my people in Newbury Jobcentre are applying the availability and actively seeking employment conditions to all claimants, including those who are taking part in the Newbury by-pass protest. My manager at Newbury has confirmed that, as with other claimants, protesters are seen regularly to check their jobsearch and some have applied for and been submitted to vacancies on display at the Jobcentre.

If there are any doubts about whether an individual satisfies the entitlement conditions their claim is referred to the independent adjudicating authorities for a decision. A number of adjudication disallowances have been obtained on claims made by protesters.

Out-of-school Child Care Initiative

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when the details of the new funding programme for out-of-school child care commencing April 1996 will be made available. [10339]

Mr. Paice: Officials are currently working, in consultation with training and enterprise councils, to develop planning guidance for the extension in England of this initiative announced following the Chancellor's Budget statement. I expect that this guidance will be issued to TECs in the next few weeks.

Student Loans

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if the Education (Students Loans) Bill allows higher education institutions to recover the costs of validating applications for private sector loans. [10294]

Mr. Forth: Our aim is that higher education institutions will receive payments in respect of the costs they incur in certifying loan applications, irrespective of whether these are for public or private sector loans. I am considering whether the Bill requires amendment to put this beyond doubt.

I shall write to my right hon. Friend once I have taken a decision.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Claimants, Walthamstow

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of people in Walthamstow in receipt of income support. [8981]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of income support is a matter for Peter Mathieson, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Neil Gerrard, dated 17 January 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about what is his estimate of the number of people in Walthamstow in receipt of Income Support (IS).

The information is not available in the format requested. This is because statistics are not kept which are specific to Parliamentary Constituencies, the borders of which are not the same as those of benefit offices. Statistics are kept on the IS computer system on the number of people claiming IS in each Benefit Agency District.

The Lea Roding District comprises of the Ilford, Leytonstone and Walthamstow benefit offices. The number of people claiming income support from this District for the quarter ended 30 November 1995 was 62,777, this is a provisional figure which may be subject to amendment.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Benefits Agency (Assaults on Staff)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish for each standard region and for the United Kingdom the number of reported cases of assault on the staff of the Benefits Agency in their offices or in the course of their work for the last available three years; and if he will make a statement. [8687]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of the Benefits Agency is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Dafydd Wigley, dated 18 January 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will publish for each standard region and for the United Kingdom the number of reported cases of assault on the staff of the Benefits Agency in their offices or in the course of their work for the last available three years; and if he will make a statement.

The Benefits Agency produces annual statistics to show the reported numbers of assaults on its staff. These statistics are not available in the form requested. Annexe A gives details of the information available.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Annexe A: Reported cases of assault on the staff of the benefits agency

Analysis by area directorate

	[1]1992	1993	1994
Scotland and Northern England			
Tyne Tees	—	5	7
South Yorkshire and Humberside	—	11	8
North and West Yorkshire	—	6	7
Glasgow and Paisley	—	2	9
North, Central and West Scotland	—	2	3
Eastern Scotland	—	1	7
Wales and Central England			
East Midlands	—	5	11
Midlands South West	—	5	3
West Mercia	—	5	1
Wales	—	4	5
Merseyside	—	9	3
Greater Manchester	—	2	1
Lancashire and Cumbria	—	6	5
Southern England			
Anglia	—	3	4
Chilterns	—	0	12
South London and West Sussex	—	4	16
West Country	—	7	7
East London and Essex	—	3	5
South East	—	6	9
Wessex	—	1	3
Totals	108	87	126

[1] Area details not available.
Figures are provisional and subject to amendment.

Habitual Residence Test

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many people who have been tested by the Benefits Agency regarding their habitual residence in the common travel area have passed the habitual residence test since it introduction in August 1994; and how many were *(a)* European Economic Area nationals, *(b)* UK citizens and *(c)* others; [6812]

(2) if he will now update the information contained in his answer to the hon. Member for Dagenham (Ms Church) of 20 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *12*, concerning the number of British citizens who have passed the habitual residence test since its introduction; [6998]

(3) how many British citizens have passed the habitual residence test since its introduction. [10235]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table and covers the period August 1994 to November 1995. It relates only to income support. Housing benefit figures will not be available until December 1996 at the earliest.

	Pass
EEA nationals	11,660
British citizens	76,494
Others	14,323
Total	102,477

The Benefits Agency has placed figures relating to the habitual residence test in the Library since April 1995.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people who have been tested by the Benefits Agency regarding their habitual residence have passed the test each month since its introduction, broken down into European Economic Area nationals, United Kingdom citizens and others. [10236]

Mr. Heald: The information is set out in the table.

Number of claims which have passed the habitual residence test since introduction

Month and year	*EEA nationals*	*UK citizens*	*Others*
August 1994	286	846	249
September 1994	698	2,680	648
October 1994	932	3,533	876
November 1994	909	4,251	970
December 1994	513	3,637	729
January 1995	740	4,664	831
February 1995	774	4,213	950
March 1995	779	4,755	990
April 1995	668	4,078	845
May 1995	640	5,417	947
June 1995	726	5,990	1,065
July 1995	654	6,424	1,078
August 1995	779	7,276	873
September 1995	725	6,526	850
October 1995	930	6,431	822
November 1995	800	6,085	694
December 1995	371	4,229	459

1. These figures are provisional and may be subject to change. From April 1995 onwards these figures are available in the Library.
2. The figures for "UK Citizens" and "Others" may include repeat claims.
3. "Others" include foreign nationals who have been given indefinite leave to enter or remain in the UK by the immigration authorities.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of those who failed the habitual residence test in its first year were United Kingdom citizens; what was the total estimated savings from the test in its first year; what proportion of the savings was owing to failure by United Kingdom citizens; and if he will set out the basis of his calculation. [10237]

Mr. Heald: Twenty one per cent. of income support claimants who failed the habitual residence test were British citizens. The total estimated income-related benefits savings from the test in its first year is £28 million. The proportion of savings owing to failure by British citizens is 53 per cent. of this figure. These savings are calculated on the basis that European Union citizens would have received income-related benefits, including income support, averaging £104.95 a week for an estimated period of 13 weeks before going off benefit. British citizens are assumed to have received the same amount for an estimated 26 weeks. The amount of benefit is based on the income support personal allowance for single claimants aged over 25 plus the average amount of housing benefit and council tax benefit paid in the London area. Figures relating to failures arising out of housing benefit without receipt of income support will not be available until late 1996.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on *(a)* the operation of and *(b)* the forecasting procedures for cold weather payments. [9624]

Mr. Heald: The cold weather payments scheme, which runs from 1 November to 31 March each year, works very well: payments are made automatically; current arrangements are sensible, responsive, and are based on the best scientific information from the Meteorological Office. Extra help is focused on the most vulnerable groups receiving income support, when there is a sustained period of very cold weather in their area. So far this winter, 3.8 million payments worth almost £32 million have been made.

In 1991, when the cold weather payment scheme was reviewed, we built into its operation the facility for the Meteorological Office to forecast periods of cold weather in advance. This enables the payment process to start more quickly as payments can be decided on the basis of forecasts without having to wait for seven days of recorded data. If the recorded data which follows do not confirm the forecast, the payments are not recalled. All forecasts used so far this winter have been confirmed by recorded data.

Reduced Earnings Allowance

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what are the principal prescribed diseases for which reduced earnings allowance is currently claimed; [10120]

(2) what were the principal prescribed diseases for which reduced earnings allowance was claimed for the first time including back-dating claims in 1994 and 1995; [10121]

(3) how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women over pensionable age in receipt of reduced earnings allowance at the end of (i) 1994 and (ii) 1995 were in paid employment in each region; [10125]

(4) how many people were awarded, and how much money was paid in, claims, backdated more than 12 months, of reduced earnings allowance in 1994 and 1995, in each region; [10126]

(5) what was the average backdating of those claims backdated more than 12 months for reduced earnings allowance in 1994 and 1995. [10127]

Mr. Heald: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people were awarded reduced earnings allowance for the first time in each of the months in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1995. [10122]

Mr. Heald: The available information is in the table:

Awards[1] of reduced earnings allowance commencing in the year ending 31 March 1994 analysed by month of commencement

	Number
All months[2]	2,953
April 1993	623
May 1993	382
June 1993	376
July 1993	282
August 1993	141
September 1993	268
October 1993	423
November 1993	141
December 1993	80
January 1994	94
February 1994	94
March 1994	47

[1] A customer may be in receipt of more than one award. [2] Figures may not sum due to calculation of allowance for late returns.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women are currently in receipt of reduced earnings allowance in each region. [10123]

Mr. Heald: The latest available information is in the table.

Awards[1] of reduced earnings allowance current at 2 April 1994 analysed by region

	Men	*Women*
Great Britain[2]	115,367	27,428
England	92,313	23,415
Northern	20,871	2,886
Yorkshire and Humberside	12,430	2,066
East Midlands	10,540	1,987
East Anglia	2,317	1,177
South-East	15,704	5,282
South-West	5,548	1,625
West Midlands	9,291	3,012
North-West	15,613	5,381
Scotland	9,412	1,710
Wales	12,922	2,095
Overseas	721	208

[1] A customer may be in receipt of more than one award.
[2] Figures may not sum due to calculation of allowance for late returns.
Figures include frozen reduced earnings allowance.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women in receipt of reduced earnings allowance were over pensionable age, in each region, at the end of (i) 1994, and (ii) 1995. [10124]

Mr. Heald: The information requested is not available. The latest available information is in the table.

Awards[2] of reduced earnings allowance current at 2 April 1994 for those over pensionable age[1] analysed by region.

	Men[3]	*Women[4]*
Great Britain[5]	42,744	12,089
England	32,538	10,013
Northern	7,352	1,166
Yorkshire and Humberside	5,148	920
East Midlands	3,922	751
East Anglia	810	416
South East	4,629	2,303
South West	1,966	633
West Midlands	3,456	1,087
North West	5,254	2,738
Scotland	3,360	771
Wales	6,660	1,186
Overseas	188	119

Note:
[1] Age at 31 March 1994
Includes frozen or restricted reduced earnings allowance.
[2] A customer may be in receipt of more than one award.
[3] Age 65 and over.
[4] Age 60 and over.
[5] Figures may not sum due to calculation for late returns.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total amount currently paid in reduced earnings allowance each *(a)* week, *(b)* month, and *(c)* year to people over pensionable age. [10128]

Mr. Heald: The table gives current estimates of the amount paid.

£ million

Estimated amount currently paid to reduced earnings allowance recipients over pensionable age	*Total*
(a) each week	2
(b) each month	8
(c) each year	85

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest £1 million, but are not accurate to that degree.
2. The figures for each month are based on a standard month of 4.33 weeks.
3. Figures are given at 1995–96 prices.
4. Includes frozen or restricted reduced earnings allowance payable to those who had retired before 10 April 1989.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of *(a)* the numbers of people who would be affected by, and *(b)* the cost of, extending the four-week extended payments of housing benefit to people who start work having been on (i) incapacity benefit, (ii) severe disablement allowance, (iii) income support disability premium and (iv) in receipt of incapacity benefit within 26 weeks of starting a job. [10141]

Mr. Heald: It is not possible to estimate the number of people who would be affected by, or the cost of extending, the four-week extended payments of housing benefit to those moving directly into work from incapacity benefit, severe disablement allowance or income support disability premium. In 1996–97, the cost of extending the scheme to people in receipt of incapacity benefit within 26 weeks of starting a job is estimated to be £2 million[1] with around 15,000 people affected.

Note:
[1] Estimate applies only to people registering as unemployed after leaving the short term higher or long term rate of incapacity benefit.

Income Support Disability Premium

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of *(a)* the costs of and *(b)* the number of people who would benefit from increasing the £15 earnings disregard for claimants of the income support disability premium to £24.50 per week. [10136]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table:

	Effect of increasing the earnings disregard for those with the IS disability premium, from £15 to £24.50 per week
Total cost	£5 million
Gainers	10,000

1. The estimate assumes an increase in the earnings disregard in Income Support only. Costs include increased costs of housing benefit and council tax benefit due to increased entitlements to those benefits.
2. Modelled using the 1991–1992 and 1993 Family Expenditure Surveys, and the May 1994 Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, uprated to 1996–97 levels. Costs rounded to the nearest £5 million, gainers to the nearest 5,000.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people currently claiming incapacity benefit are *(a)* single, *(b)* in a couple, *(c)* in a couple with children and *(d)* single with children. [10138]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Number of beneficiaries of incapacity benefit on 31 May 1995

	Number
All beneficiaries	1,846,000
No dependency increases	1,373,000
Adult dependency increase only	345,000
Child dependency increase only	54,000
Both adult and child dependency increase	72,000

Figures taken from a 5 per cent. sample of the incapacity benefit computer system, rounded to the nearest thousand, and excludes a small number of cases paid clerically. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Severe Disablement Allowance

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people currently claiming severe disablement allowance are *(a)* single, *(b)* in a couple, *(c)* in a couple with children and *(d)* single with children. [10143]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Number of beneficiaries of severe disablement allowance on 31 May 1995

	Number
All beneficiaries	324,000
No dependency increases	317,000
Adult dependency increase only	2,000
Child dependency increase only	4,000
Both adult and child dependency increase	2,000

Figures taken from a 5 per cent. sample of the incapacity benefit computer system, rounded to the nearest thousand, and excludes a small number of cases paid clerically. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the numbers of appeals currently lodged against a decision that the claimant is capable of work; what is the average waiting time for appeals to be heard; and in how many appeals the claimant has been represented. [10132]

Mr. Heald: The information requested is not currently available. However, provisional figures show that there are currently 17,649 appeals outstanding against the incapacity benefit all-work test.

Disability Working Allowance

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are currently claiming disability working allowance; and what are *(a)* the total administration costs and *(b)* the average weekly administration cost per beneficiary. [10174]

Mr. Heald: The number of people in receipt of disability working allowance at the end of December 1995 was 7,388.

The latest information on administration costs is for the year 1994–95. In 1994–95, the average number of people claiming disability working allowance was 5,000 and the total administration costs were £5.7 million. This gives an average weekly cost per beneficiary of £23.08.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many recipients of disability working allowance receive housing benefit; and what is the average amount payable. [10131]

Mr. Heald: On 31 May 1994, 1,000 housing benefit recipients declared disability working allowance as income. The average weekly amount of housing benefit payable was £30.19.

Notes:

1. Figures refer to benefit units which may be a single person or a couple. In the case of a couple, either the claimant or partner was in receipt of disability working allowance.

2. Recipients have been rounded to the nearest thousand and the average amount to the nearest penny.

3. The information given is based on a very small number of sample cases and is therefore subject to a high degree of variance.

Source:

Housing Benefit Management Information System, annual 1 per cent. sample enquiries taken at the end of May 1994.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average gross weekly earnings received by claimants of disability working allowance who also receive *(a)* invalidity benefit, *(c)* incapacity benefit, *(c)* disability living allowance, *(d)* disability premium in income support, *(e)* disability premium in housing benefit, *(f)* disability premium in council tax benefit and *(g)* severe disablement allowance. [10135]

Mr. Heald: A person in work cannot be in receipt of invalidity benefit, incapacity benefit, income support[1] or severe disablement allowance while in receipt of disability working allowance.

The information in the table shows the average gross weekly earnings, by main qualifying benefit, of people in receipt of disability working allowance at the end of July 1995:

	Numbers in receipt of benefit on 31 July 1995	*Average gross weekly earnings £*
All cases	6,544	82.12
Main qualifying benefit		
Invalidity benefit	1,052	71.72
Incapacity benefit	132	78.33
Disability living allowance	4,210	88.72
Disability premium in income support	668	66.85
Disability premium in housing benefit	19	90.87
Disability premium in council tax benefit	18	61.35
Severe disablement allowance	445	68.76

Notes:

1. There are some infrequent circumstances in which income support and disability working allowance may be paid together.

2. Claimants can be in receipt of more than one qualifying benefit and therefore actual numbers in receipt of each qualifying benefit may be higher.

Source:

Disability working allowance computer system (100 per cent. of all awards).

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many claims for the disability living allowance mobility component in *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94, *(c)* 1994–95 and *(d)* 1995–96, were accompanied by (i) both supporting statements, (ii) only statement 1, (iii) only statement 2 and (iv) neither statement; [10455]

(2) what was the number and percentage of decisions for the disability living allowance mobility component where the adjudication officer *(a)* required an examining medical officer's report, *(b)* required a general practitioner's factual report, *(c)* required any other evidence and *(d)* relied on the claim pack alone, in (i) 1992–93, (ii) 1993–94, (iii) 1994–95 and (iv) 1995–96. [10456]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Claims for disability living allowance are for the benefit as a whole and not for individual components. Statistics are not routinely kept on the number of supporting statements supplied with claims.

The figures in the table cover decisions made on initial awards where a mobility component was awarded.

Evidence used in initial awards[1]

Year	*Claim pack alone*	*GP's factual report*	*Examining medical practitioner report*	*Any other evidence*	*Total*[2]
1992–93[3,4]	157,000	64,000	56,000	9,000	287,000
(Per cent.)	(55)	(22)	(20)	(3)	(100)
1993–94[3]	72,000	55,000	39,000	7,000	173,000
(Per cent.)	(42)	(32)	(22)	(4)	(100)
1994–95	70,000	69,000	36,000	10,000	185,000
(Per cent.)	(38)	(37)	(19)	(5)	(100)
1995–96[5]	48,000	58,000	33,000	8,000	148,000
(Per cent.)	(33)	(39)	(22)	(6)	(100)

Notes:
[1] Omits decisions made on review or appeal.
[2] Figures may not sum due to rounding.
[3] Omits decisions where evidence type not known.
[4] 1992–93 data includes decisions made from February 1992.
[5] 1995–96 includes data upto and including December 1995.
Source:
Analytical Services Division 100 per cent. data.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of *(a)* the cost of and *(b)* the numbers of claimants who would be entitled to disability working allowance by (i) raising the applicable amounts by 5 per cent., (ii) increasing the maximum disability working allowance by 5 per cent., (iii) disregarding in full any income from a spouse or partner and (iv) reducing the hours of work from 16 to 10. [10137]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table.

The costs are given at 1995–96 prices and are net of income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit offsets

1995–96	*Net cost £ million*	*Gainers*
(i) Raising applicable amounts by 5 per cent.	1	8,000
(ii) Raising maximum DWA by 5 per cent.	2	8,000
(iii) Disregarding spouse earnings	40	10,000
(iv) Reducing hours rule	2	1,000

Notes:
Estimates for (i), (ii) and (iv) are given at 1995–96 prices rounded to the nearest £1m and 1,000 gainers, (iii) is rounded to nearest £5 million and 5,000 gainers.
1. Information from the Family Expenditure Survey 1991, 1992 and 1993 is used to estimate the effects of these changes. The data contains insufficient disability working allowance cases to allow direct modelling, therefore the changes have been modelled using proxy groups. These have been calibrated to the 1995–96 disability working allowance forecast caseload.
2. The use of proxy groups means that these estimates are subject to wide margins of error and should be treated with considerable caution.
Source:
Family Expenditure Survey.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of *(a)* the cost of raising the £3,000 lower capital threshold for disability working allowance to (i) £4,000, (ii) £5,000, (iii) £6,000, (iv) £7,000 and (v) £8,000 and (b) the numbers of claimants who would become entitled to increased benefit in each case. [10175]

Mr. Heald: The estimated effects are given in the table. Costs are given at 1995–96 prices rounded to the nearest £1 million, and are net of housing benefit/council tax benefit offsets. Gainers are rounded to the nearest 1,000 and include people who would float on to the benefit.

Increase capital limits to:	*Net cost £ million*	*Gainers*
£4,000	1	8,000
£5,000	1	8,000
£6,000	2	9,000
£7,000	2	9,000
£8,000	3	9,000

Note:
1. Information from the Family Expenditure Survey 1991, 1992 and 1993 is used to estimate the effects of these changes. The data contains insufficient disability working allowance cases to allow direct modelling, therefore the changes have been modelled using proxy groups. These have been calibrated to the 1995–96 disability working allowance forecast caseload.
2. The use of proxy groups means that these estimates are subject to wide margins of error.
Source:
Family Expenditure Survey.

Family Credit

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 24 November, *Official Report*, column *357*, if he now has provisional figures for July 1995 for the numbers of people receiving the £10 weekly allowance with (i) family credit and (ii) disability working allowance for working more than 30 hours per week. [10176]

Mr. Heald: As at 31 July 1995, the number of family credit and disability working allowance recipients who were benefiting from the 30-hour premium was 25,000 and eight respectively. By 31 August 1995, the latest date available, these had risen to 87,000 and 45. Claimants working 30 hours or more a week, who were in receipt of benefit when the premium was introduced on 17 July 1995, will receive the additional benefit when they renew their claims.

Sources:
Family credit 5 per cent. sample of awards.
Disability working allowance 100 per cent. count of awards.

Disability Premium

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average amount of income support received by claimants who are entitled to the disability premium. [10134]

Mr. Heald: At February 1995, the latest date for which figures are available, the average amount of income support received by claimants who are entitled to the disability premium was £58.94 a week.

Source:

Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry February 1995.

Social Fund

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many additional claims have been made to the social fund by ex-prisoners not in their own home. [10453]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. The available information about applications to the social fund by all ex-prisoners in Great Britain is in the table. The information relates to community care grants for 1995–96.

Month	*Decisions*	*Refusals*	*Awards*
April	3,229	1,762	1,467
May	2,637	1,418	1,219
June	2,525	1,319	1,206
July	2,181	1,155	1,026
August	2,127	1,083	1,044
September	2,146	1,156	990
October	2,085	1,078	1,007
November	2,057	1,057	1,000
December	1,689	790	899
Total	20,676	10,818	9,858

Housing Benefit

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what steps have been taken to monitor the change in housing benefit regulations on the additional benefits claimed by prisoners on their release after losing their entitlement to housing benefit under the new regulations; [10451]

(2) how much has been saved in housing benefit since the implemention of the new regulations reducing the period of entitlement for prisoners' claims from 52 to 13 weeks. [10452]

Mr. Heald: New rules concerning the treatment of temporary absence from the home were introduced in housing benefit from April 1995. Information about the number of prisoners affected by the new rules will be available around the end of 1996. While benefit savings arising from the change to prisoners are estimated to be up to £10 million in a full year, the difficulty in quantifying behavioural effects prevents more robust estimates being made.

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will publish his report of the review of the accuracy of housing benefit claims. [11314]

Mr. Lilley: I am today publishing the main report of this review which shows that housing benefit fraud costs the taxpayer £1 billion a year. I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Library. I am grateful to the 52 local authorities and their staff who carried out the field work. The results establish for the first time the amount of loss through fraud, abuse and error and indicate where the highest risks of such losses lie.

This level of fraud is clearly unacceptable. Local authorities which are not putting effort into tackling fraud and abuse must address the problem urgently. We already give local authorities financial incentives to detect fraud, rewarding success and penalising those who do too little. The success of this scheme has doubled savings from £92 million in 1993–94 to £171 million in 1994–95.

It is the responsibility of each local authority to protect taxpayers' money and not allow fraud to go unchecked. The results of the new review will enable them to concentrate their efforts on high risk categories of claimants and tenants.

Using this information, I am developing a five-year strategy which will crack down on this unacceptable level of fraud effectively and efficiently.

I will be strengthening the financial incentives for local authorities to detect fraud by increasing the rewards for success and the penalties for those who do too little.

I will be making funds of up to £10 million available specifically to enable local authorities to develop innovative ideas to tackle fraud.

I will be launching a national register of housing benefit and council tax benefit. This will match data across local authorities against departmental fraud detection systems—catching people claiming from more than one local authority.

We will be working closely with the Audit Commission to tighten up local authority methods of preventing fraudulent claims getting into the system.

Income Support

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people currently claiming income support with a disability premium are *(a)* single, *(b)* in a couple, *(c)* in a couple with children and *(d)* single with children. [10139]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table:

	Number
Total number of income support recipients with the disability premium	722,000
Of which:	
Single	534,000
Single with children	56,000
Single without children	477,000
Couples	189,000
Couples with children	108,000
Couples without children	80,000

Note:

Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.

Source:

Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry February 1995.

Benefit Levels

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the average amounts currently payable to claimants of *(a)* severe disablement allowance, *(b)* unemployment benefit and *(c)* incapacity benefit. [10142]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table:

	£
Average weekly amount of severe disablement allowance[1]	44.60
Average weekly amount of unemployment benefit[2]	49.02
Average weekly amount of incapacity benefit[1, 3]	83.48

[1] Figure taken as at 31 May 1995, a small number of clerical cases were excluded from the sample.
[2] Figure taken as at 11 May 1995.
[3] Figure is an average of all the rates of incapacity benefit. A breakdown by amounts of short-term and the long-term 1B rates is not currently available.
Most recent figures from a 5 per cent. sample of claims to benefits in Great Britain taken from the relevant computer scans.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Concessionary Television Licences

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many people qualified for a concessionary television licence in each year since 1990 in the area covered by Easington district council. [9512]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* The numbers of concessionary television licence beneficiaries in the Easington district council area for each financial year since 1990 were:

1990–91: 2,665
1991–92: 2,477
1992–93: 2,161
1993–94: 1,995
1994–95: 1,878
1995–96: 1,817 (to date).

WALES

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all qualitative and quantitative research projects and surveys carried out for his Department into aspects of public attitudes and opinons *(a)* in general and *(b)* in relation to specific policy proposals in each of the past three years to December 1995, indicating for each project or survey (i) the date on which the research was commissioned, (ii) the amount which his Department spent, (iii) who carried out the research, (iv) the number of people surveyed or taking part, (v) the location and time scale and (vi) which individuals and organisations have been given access to the findings. [5976]

Mr. Hague *[holding answer 14 December 1995]:* The information requested is as follows. The total cost of the surveys listed was approximately £420,000. The cost of individual contracts is confidential.

In addition to the items listed, the Welsh Office commissions statistical surveys which sometimes include questions seeking the views of respondents. particular cases include the 1995 Welsh health survey, which contained some questions about public attitudes to services provided by the national health service and social services and the 1994 Welsh employer survey, which among other things, sought the views of employers on reasons for problems in filling vacancies and opinions of the service provided by various organisations. The marginal costs of including these questions in statistical surveys cannot readily be calculated. Reports on all such surveys are published.

Welsh office

THE PATIENTS CHARTER FOR WALES

To provide information on public view of the Charter prior to re-issue of the Charter in Summer 1994.

Research commissioned: February 1994.

Conducted by: Durdle Davies Business Research.

Number surveyed/taking part: 35.

Location: rural and coastal North Wales and an urban district of South Wales.

Timescale: two months.

Individuals/organisations given access to findings: internal use used within the Department.

THE PATIENTS CHARTER FOR WALES

To assess awareness and views on the Charter.

Research commissioned: January 1995.

Conducted by: Community Health Councils Wales Development Unit.

Number surveyed/taking part: 100.

Locations: Swansea and Caernarfon.

Timescale: two months.

Individuals/organisations given access to findings: All Community Health Councils in Wales.

HOSPITAL AND AMBULANCE SERVICES

To assess ways in which the NHS performance tables could be made more user friendly and more easily understood by the general public.

Research commissioned: February 1995.

Conducted by: BJM Research and Consultancy Ltd.

Numbers surveyed/taking part: 70.

Location: Cardiff, Newport, Carmarthen, Bala, Bethesda.

Timescale: two months.

Individuals/organisations given access to findings: internal use within the Department.

OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDCARE GRANT INITIATIVE IN WALES

Evaluation of the grant scheme in Wales.

Research commissioned: October 1995.

Conducted by: University of Glamorgan.

Numbers surveyed/taking part: 625.

Location: all Wales.

Timescale: four weeks.

Individuals/organisations given access to findings: final report yet to be produced.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY PROMOTION

To assess effectiveness of energy efficiency promotion in Wales.

Research commissioned: January 1993.

Conducted by: William Battle and Associates.

Numbers surveyed/taking part: 286 companies.

Locations: all Wales.

Timescale: January to November 1993.

Individuals/organisations given access to findings: internal use the Welsh Office and the Department of the Environment.

PARENTS CHARTER

To assess awareness of the Charter.

Research commissioned: October 1994.

Conducted by: Beaufort Research.

Numbers surveyed/taking part: 1,021.

Location: all Wales.

Timescale: November 1994.

Individuals/organisations given access to findings: copies of the report have been placed in the House of Commons Library

RESEARCH INTO BUS-BACK ADVERTISING

To evaluate the effectiveness of bus-back advertising, both in general and in response to Drink-Drive advertising campaign.

Research commissioned: December 1993.

Conducted by: William Battle and Associates.

Numbers surveyed/taking part: 700.

Location: all Wales

Timescale: February-March 1994.

Individuals/organisations given access to findings: internal use in the Welsh Office and the Department of Transport.

ROAD SAFETY EDUCATION

To evaluate the effectiveness of theatre tours in road safety education.

Research commissioned: June 1994 (jointly with the Scottish Office).

Conducted by: The Scottish Council for Research in Education.

Numbers surveyed/taking part: 712 pupils.

Location: Dyfed.

Timescale: October 1994.

Individuals/organisations given access to findings: summaries given to county councils in Wales, the schools which took part and Dyfed-Powys police.

GENERIC PRESCRIBING AND PATIENTS ATTITUDES

To estimate the influence of generically written prescription by GPs.

Research commissioned: December 1992.

Conducted by: The Welsh School of Pharmacy.

Numbers surveyed/taking part: 750.

Locations: Mid Glamorgan and Gwent.

Timescale: December 1992—December 1993.

Individuals/organisations given access to findings: the NHS in Wales.

CADW: Welsh Historic Monuments Executive Agency

VISITOR SURVEYS OF MONUMENTS IN STATE CARE

To provide information on visitor origins, characteristics and economic status; and to assess levels of satisfaction.

and to monitor satisfaction levels.

Research commissioned: Spring 1991.

Conducted by: Beaufort Research.

Numbers surveyed/taking part: 2,229.

Location: various monuments in Wales.

Timescale: July-August 1993.

Individuals/organisations given access to findings: findings are in the public domain.

VISITOR SURVEYS OF MONUMENTS IN STATE CARE

To provide up to date visitor profiles; to establish awareness of CADW and to monitor satisfaction levels.

Research commissioned. June 1994.

Conducted by Hall, Harrison and Cowley.

Numbers surveyed/taking part: 1,500 people.

Location: various monuments in Wales.

Timescale: August-September 1994; and August-September 1995.

Individuals/organisation given access to findings: findings are in the public domain.

VISITOR SURVEYS OF MONUMENTS IN STATE CARE

To provide up to date profiles visitor profiles; to establish awareness of CADW and to monitor satisfaction levels.

Research commissioned: June 1994.

Conducted by: Hall Harrison and Cowley.

Numbers surveyed/taking part: 1,500 people.

Locations: various monuments in Wales.

Timescale: August-September 1995.

Individuals/organisations given access to findings: findings are in the public domain.

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a table showing the latest estimate of the gross domestic product per head in each of the eight Welsh counties, for each of the last 10 years, at constant prices. [9340]

Mr. Hague: The latest available information, at current prices, is shown in the following table. There are no official estimates of county GDP at constant price.

Gross domestic product per head (£) by county at factor cost: current prices

	1981	*1984*	*1987*	*1989*	*1991*
Clwyd	2,638	3,869	5,451	6,876	7,848
Dyfed and Powys	3,080	3,848	5,194	5,871	6,402
Gwent	2,972	3,836	5,185	6,524	7,288
Gwynedd	2,863	3,500	4,760	5,967	6,477
Mid Glamorgan	2,774	3,227	4,432	5,598	5,883
South Glamorgan	3,797	5,094	6,328	8,022	9,409
West Glamorgan	3,434	3,744	5,273	6,526	7,493

Source:
Central Statistical Office.

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has had from Wales concerning nursery vouchers; and if he will make a statement. [9329]

Mr. Richards: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) on 15 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *379*.

Heart Surgery

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the current availability of cardiac surgical facilities in Wales; and what representations he has received on this matter in the past year. [10337]

Mr. Richards: Cardiac surgery in Wales is currently provided by an adult unit and a paediatric unit at the University hospital of Wales. A second adult unit will open at Morriston hospital in the late summer of 1997.

My right hon. Friend and I have not received any representations on the availability of these facilities in the past year.

Children with Special Needs

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by local education authority and for Wales as a whole for each year since 1985 *(a)* the number of education psychologists employed, *(b)* the ratio of education psychologists to school children, *(c)* the number of children with statements and *(d)* the ratio of children with statements to the schools age population per 10,000 pupils. [8916]

Mr. Richards: Information about the number of education psychologists prior to January 1992 is not centrally available. The available information is shown in the following tables.

Number of education psychologists[1]

	1992	1993	1994	1995
Clwyd	19	20	17	17
Dyfed	8	10	13	13
Gwent	18	21	20	21
Gwynedd	6	5	6	7
Mid Glamorgan	15	15	15	14
Powys	4	4	5	5
South Glamorgan	10	10	10	10
West Glamorgan	10	10	12	12
Wales	90	95	98	99

Note:
[1] Full time equivalent education psychologists as at January each year.
Source: STATS2 form.

Number of children with statements of special educational needs[1]

	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Clwyd	1,287	1,665	1,528	1,877	2,328	2,512	2,553	2,244	3,219	2,321	2,370
Dyfed	497	643	701	487	561	648	830	1,066	1,319	1,667	2,024
Gwent	1,722	1,801	1,817	1,571	1,693	1,978	2,116	1,957	2,297	2,489	2,475
Gwynedd	969	889	896	815	722	744	814	860	865	872	1,087
Mid Glamorgan	3,988	3,766	3,983	3,396	2,828	3,282	3,103	3,944	4,016	4,234	1,539
Powys	232	236	744	218	264	293	327	518	517	594	647
South Glamorgan	1,170	1,255	1,268	1,249	1,217	1,323	1,357	1,347	1,374	1,525	1,750
West Glamorgan	1,968	1,959	2,226	2,115	2,129	613	2,175	2,361	2,333	2,598	2,629
Wales	11,833	12,214	13,163	11,728	11,742	11,393	13,275	14,297	15,940	16,300	14,521

Note:
[1] At January each year. Children are shown against the authority in which they are registered, irrespective of where they are educated.
Source:
Forms 21M and STATS2.

Ratio of education psychologists to school children[1]

	1992	1993	1994	1995
Clwyd	1: 3,704	1: 3,542	1: 4,163	1: 4,214
Dyfed	1: 7,236	1: 5,796	1: 4,470	1: 4,513
Gwent	1: 4,234	1: 3,687	1: 3,940	1: 3,819
Gwynedd	1: 6,013	1: 7,362	1: 6,130	1: 5,347
Mid Glamorgan	1: 6,388	1: 6,478	1: 6,589	1: 7,124
Powys	1: 4,762	1: 4,801	1: 3,851	1: 3,930
South Glamorgan	1: 7,002	1: 7,142	1: 7,263	1: 7,366
West Glamorgan	1: 6,152	1: 6,209	1: 5,241	1: 5,274
Wales	1: 5,411	1: 5,188	1: 5,082	1: 5,093

Note:
[1] At January each year. The ratio of the number of full time equivalent education psychologists to the number of full time and part time children in maintained and independent schools.
Source:
STATS2 form and Schools Census (STATS1).

Number of children with statements per 10,000 school children[1]

	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Clwyd	175	231	215	269	334	362	367	319	454	328	331
Dyfed	87	114	125	87	98	114	145	184	228	287	345
Gwent	219	234	240	211	228	265	281	257	297	316	309
Gwynedd	235	220	227	212	191	200	225	238	235	237	290
Mid Glamorgan	398	382	411	357	300	347	327	412	413	428	154
Powys	117	122	389	115	140	155	173	272	269	308	329
South Glamorgan	171	185	189	186	181	196	198	192	192	210	238
West Glamorgan	306	312	360	347	350	101	356	384	376	413	415
Wales	235	247	270	244	244	237	276	294	323	327	288

Note:
[1] At January each year. Calculated as the number of children with statements of special educational needs divided by the number of full time and part time children in maintained and independent schools, multiplied by 10,000.
Source:
Forms 21M, STATS2 & STTS1.

Severn Estuary

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with *(a)* the chairman of the National Rivers Authority, Wales and *(b)* other relevant environmental protection bodies as regards the designation of the Severn estuary west of the Severn bridge as a coastal water within the meaning of the European Union municipal waste water treatment directive. [10658]

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) on 18 May 1994, *Official Report*, columns *511–12*, by the then Minister of State for the Environment and Countryside.

Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what estimates he has made of the incidence of MRSA in Welsh hospitals; when he last issued guidelines with respect to information to be supplied between hospitals as regards incidence of MRSA when patients are being transported between hospitals and in other circumstances relevant to the spread of infection; and if he will make a statement; [10656]

(2) what guidelines he has issued to hospitals, as regards the information to be supplied to *(a)* health authorities, *(b)* fundholders and *(c)* community health councils concerning (i) the incidence of MRSA, (ii) precautionary measures to be taken with respect to reducing the spread of MRSA and (iii) prescribing policies of general practitioners and hospital physicians; and what other steps he is taking to reduce the incidence of the MRSA virus. [10657]

Mr. Hague: Last year, the Chief Medical Officer in the Welsh Office invited the Public Health Laboratory Service in Wales to undertake a surveillance project on MRSA in Wales.

Revised guidance on hospital infection control management arrangements, which includes new advice on the surveillance of MRSA, was issued to the NHS in Wales in June 1995.

My Department has commended to the NHS guidance issued in 1986 and 1990, by the Hospital Infection Society and the British Society for Antimicrobial Chemotherapy on methods for the control of the spread of MRSA. This emphasises the need for effective communication between relevant parties when managing an infectious disease.

The Department has not issued any formal prescribing guidelines regarding MRSA. However, policies and procedures developed at health authority level are available to all provider units.

Rented Housing (Consultation)

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what response he has received to the consultation document. "More Choice in the Rented Sector," issued on 4 August 1995; and if he will make a statement. [11463]

Mr. Hague: The consultation paper set out Government proposals to increase competition in the rented sector by removing current restrictions on who should be able to compete for housing association grant or take on transferred local authority housing. It argued that new forms of non-profit landlord should be able to register with Housing for Wales, and that a licensing system should be established to enable profit-making landlords to receive grant and transferred stock. A series of proposals regarding the monitoring and regulation of social housing were put forward, including rent controls and provisions to recoup excessive surpluses. The paper also sought views on the establishment of a statutory ombudsman for the independent rented sector; and on the appropriate approach to determining the standards to which housing schemes must conform.

Forty-seven responses were received. A list of respondents has been placed in the Library of the House. Copies of individual responses may be obtained through the Library. One response was submitted on a confidential basis.

These replies have been considered carefully. The Government have decided to proceed at once with proposals to allow new forms of non-profit landlord, such as local hosing companies, to register with Housing for Wales. I have also decided to take statutory powers to establish an ombudsman service in due course. The necessary provisions are contained in the Housing Bill which was published today. The Bill also provides new powers for Housing for Wales to protect publicly funded stock and tenants' interests in the event of a landlord becoming insolvent.

In order to facilitate transfers of local authority stock to these and other registered landlords, the Government will adopt a flexible approach to the size limit for transfers. My Department intends to issue guidance on hosing transfers incorporating advice on this and other policy changes.

The Government also intend to take forward its proposals to introduce profit-making landlords to the sector, with the associated controls over rents and surpluses. Because of the urgent need to deal with leasehold issues in a Bill of manageable size, legislation to effect this proposal will be deferred. My Department will consult on draft clauses for these provisions, with a view to including them in future legislation. Given the postponement of legislation on opening up competition on housing association grant to profit-making companies, the Government do not intend to abolish tax relief grant at this stage.

On scheme development standards, Housing for Wales will retain the present approach for the time being. The Department of Environment and the Housing Corporation are commissioning a study into the feasibility of developing a series of housing quality indicators. A report is expected in May. I shall consider the results of the study and make a further statement on scheme development standards in due course.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much each local authority took from its reserves to fund their budgets for 1995–96. [10283]

Mr. Gwilym Jones *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* The amounts local authorities budgeted, at the beginning of the year, to take from their reserves to fund expenditure in 1995–96 are given in the following table.

Budgeted appropriations from/to financial reserves

£ thousands

	1995–96 Appropriations from/ to financial reserves
District Councils	
Alyn and Deeside	871
Colwyn	452
Delyn	1,349
Glyndwr	1,272
Rhuddlan	100
Wrexham Maelor	623
Carmathen	3,639
Ceredigion	512
Dinefwr	239
Llanelli	2,652
Preseli Pembrokeshire	3,580
South Pembrokeshire	570
Blaenau Gwent	1,906
Islwyn	4,770
Monmouth	1,548
Newport	2,339
Torfaen	400
Aberconwy	301
Arfon	831
Dwyfor	2,046
Meirionnydd	712
Ynys Mon	2,513
Cynon Valley	1,582
Merthyr Tydfil	142
Ogwr	379
Rhondda	5,833
Rhymney Valley	95
Taff Ely	1,233
Brecknock	1,268
Montgomeryshire	180
Radnorshire	0
Cardiff	1,960
Vale of Glamorgan	1,010
Port Talbot	4,753
Lliw Valley	306
Neath	4,046
Swansea	2,291
County Councils	
Clwyd	3,690
Dyfed	6,437
Gwent	5,914
Gwynedd	3,297
Mid Glamorgan	11,379
Powys	4,189
South Glamorgan	3,238
West Glamorgan	3,617
Police Authorities	
Dyfed/Powys Police Authority	–400
Gwent Police Authority	0
North Wales Police Authority	0
South Wales Police Authority	–3,000

Source: Local authority returns.

DEFENCE

Coastal Arms Dumps

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what United Kingdom coastal areas have been used by his Ministry as arms dumps in addition to Beaufort's dyke. [9459]

Mr. Soames: Complete records of past MOD sea-dumping operations are not available. However, from surviving records it has been established that, apart from Beaufort's dyke, the following approximate areas were designated as conventional explosive dumping grounds around the UK coast before 1973. Many of the sites listed may have been used for emergency purposes only, if at all.

Area	*Position*	
Hurds Deep	49 30 00 N	3 34 00 W
East of Orford Ness	52 07 00 N	1 55 00 E
Inner Sound of Raasay	57 19 00 N	5 51 00 W
Isle of May, Firth of Forth[1]	56 10 45 N	2 30 15 W
Isle of May, Firth of Forth[1]	56 11 24 N	2 29 00 W
St. Catherines Deep	50 35 00 N	1 12 00 W
East Swin—Kings Channel	51 47 30 N	1 30 00 E
North West of Alderney[1]	49 50 00 N	2 18 00 W
North West of Alderney[1]	49 47 00 N	2 17 00 W
South South West of Guernsey	49 18 00 N	2 42 00 W
Whitesand Bay, Playmouth	50 18 45 N	4 16 00 W
Milford Haven[2]	51 34 30 N	5 01 00 W
Milford Haven[2]	51 38 00 N	5 20 00 W
Milford Haven[2]	51 43 30 N	5 33 45 W
Sound of Mull	56 30 00 N	5 37 00 W
East of Aberdeen	57 09 00 N	1 58 30 W
Loch Linnhe	56 30 00 N	5 37 00 W
Firth of Clyde	55 37 00 N	4 59 30 W

[1] Two sites.
[2] Three sites.

The adoption of the London and Olso Conventions in 1972 ended sea dumping of conventional munitions on the UK continental shelf. With one exception of an emergency dumping in 1976 at Beaufort's dyke, dumping was restricted from 1973 to an area some 400 miles south west of Land's End around the approximate co-ordinates of 48 20 00 N 13 40 00 W.

Records show that the dumping of chemical munitions ended in 1957. Dump sites were located in the northern Atlantic between 50 and 100 miles west of the Hebrides, 80 miles north-west of Northern Ireland, and 250 miles south-west of Land's End in the western approaches. A small quantity of chemical munitions was disposed of in Beaufort's dyke.

Combined Heat and Power Schemes

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many of his Department's sites combined heat and power has been installed; and on how many further sites and over what period it is planned to install combined heat and power. [10096]

Mr. Soames: Of the 19 sites considered for combined heat and power:

(a) six were discarded as not providing value for money;

(b) combined heat and power has been installed on eight sites;

(c) the remaining five sites are included in MOD's future works programme for funding of combined heat and power projects.

First Aid Training

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy regarding the marketing of training in first aid by the armed forces to outside organisations. [10032]

Mr. Soames: No specific first aid training is marketed or provided to outside organisations by the Ministry of Defence. However, first aid training modules are included in some specialist training courses undertaken by outside agencies.

Contract Power

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those of his Department's sites in which his Department is examining contract power. [10098]

Mr. Soames: The five sites are:

RAF Fylingdales

Aldershot military power station

RAF Saxa Vord

HM naval base Portsmouth

British forces Falkland Islands

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many of his Department's sites contract energy management has been implemented. [10097]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Two contracts for contract energy management have been placed, along with three water management contracts which were tendered simultaneously; 28 sites are still under consideration.

Helicopter Flight School

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what offset arrangements are being made in respect of the order of helicopters for the Defence helicopter flight school. [10031]

Mr. Arbuthnot: There are no offset arrangements being made in respect of the order of helicopters for the DHFS because the aircraft will be purchased and owned by the contractor, not the MOD.

Energy Conservation

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British Gas awards have been made to his Department's units or establishments which have achieved significant savings in fuel consumption in each of the last eight years. [10095]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Under the British Gas awards for defence energy efficiency, four awards per year have been made. From time to time, MOD establishments have entered for the gas energy management awards, a British Gas award scheme open to all organisations. In 1992, MOD's best year, establishments won one national GEM award and four regional GEM awards.

Bosnia

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the relationship between British forces serving in Bosina-Herzegovina and the third corps of the Bosnian army. [10288]

Mr. Soames: British forces in Bosnia are liaising closely with all of the former warring factions and are operating from bases on both sides of the ceasefire line as part of the implementation process.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what practical steps are being taken by British military units in Bosnia-Herzegovina to prevent attacks made upon them by Mujaheddin fighters; and if he will make a statement. [10289]

Mr. Soames: UK troops are well trained and equipped for the demands of their mission and are alert to all potential risks. Measures are taken to ensure the protection of our forces, but it would not be appropriate to go into detail.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who was responsible for attacking British troops in Sanski Most and Bosanska Krupa on Saturday 6 January; and if he will make a statement. [10293]

Mr. Soames: Bosnian Government soldiers were responsible for the incident at Bosanska Krupa on 6 January when shots were fired at a British base. Although no fire was returned, British troops adopted a high state of readiness and there were no further attacks. In a second incident later that day near Sanski Most, a British vehicle came under sustained fire from a Bosnian Serb army bunker and escorting troops returned small arms fire. No British troops were injured.

Ammunition

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the average budget allocation for the purchase of 155mm ammunition for *(a)* 1979 to 1985, *(b)* 1986 to 1990 and *(c)* 1991 to 1995. [10584]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The average annual budget allocation for the period *(c)* 1991–1995 is £10.04 million. Complete figures for the earlier periods are no longer available.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many 155mm Howitzers of all types are currently in use and in storage for Her Majesty's forces; what is the current average annual training allocation of live 155 mm rounds per 155mm Howitzer; and what is the average annual number of rounds per gun used in training for *(a)* 1979 to 1985, *(b)* 1896 to 1990 and *(c)* 1991 to 1995. [10586]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Of the two types of 155mm Howitzer currently in service, the AS90 and FH70, 205 are currently in use and 25 are held in storage. The current annual training allocation of live 155mm rounds per 155mm Howitzer is 167 rounds per gun. From 1993 to 1995, the average number of rounds per gun used in training was 286 rounds. Records are not available for the period up to 1993.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what length of time it was his Department's policy to retain production and storage records of 155mm shells, including X-ray records from *(a)* 1966 to 1979, *(b)* 1979 to 1985, *(c)* 1986 to 1990 and *(d)* 1991 to 1995. [10652]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Data record cards are held for the life of the stored ammunition. This has been a consistent policy over recent years.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many rounds of 155mm ammunition were produced in the United Kingdom in each of the years 1990 to 1995

which were for *(a)* his Department and *(b)* export. [10654]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The number of 155mm rounds purchased by my Department and manufactured in the United Kingdom during the stated years are:

1990: 0
1991: 1,000
1992: 10,000
1993: 0
1994: 14,590
1995: 14,590

The production of 155mm ammunition for export is a matter for individual companies.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many rounds of 155mm ammunition were *(a)* purchased by his Department in 1980 and *(b)* sold by his Department in 1980. [10655]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Purchase records dating back to 1980 are no longer available. With regard to sales in 1980, the relevant files were transferred when the Royal Ordnance factories were vested in British Aerospace plc in 1985.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many rounds of 155mm ammunition were, in addition to normal requirements, *(a)* acquired for use in the Gulf conflict and *(b)* actually used during the Gulf conflict. [10583]

Mr. Soames: Some 70,000 additional rounds of 155mm ammunition were acquired from allies for use in the Gulf conflict. Some 13,000 rounds of ammunition were fired, including ammunition used in training in the theatre of operations.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the value of the number of 155mm rounds written off or otherwise destroyed in *(a)* 1979 to 1985, *(b)* 1986 to 1990 and *(c)* 1991 to 1995. [10585]

Mr. Arbuthnot: No 155mm rounds were written off or otherwise destroyed during the stated periods.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many rounds of 155mm ammunition were *(a)* purchased by his Department in each year since 1990 and *(b)* sold as surplus or disposed of by his Department for any other reason in each of the same years. [10587]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The following numbers of 155mm ammunition rounds have been purchased since 1990:

1990: 15,676
1991: 28,072
1992: 46,820
1993: 30,002
1994: 51,438
1995: 14,590

No rounds have been sold or disposed of since 1990.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons records of 155mm shell sales and records for the disposal of surplus 155mm shells between 1985 and 1990 by his Department are not available as indicated in his answer of 7 November 1995, *Official Report*, column 666. [10651]

Mr. Arbuthnot: My previous answer related to the sale by MOD of surplus 155mm ammunition and not disposal of such ammunition by other means, in the period between 1985 and 1990. Papers relating to such sales, from which the information sought could be obtained, are routinely archived and destroyed when no longer current. Residual file lists suggest that no sales of surplus 155mm ammunition were made by my Department in that period.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is *(a)* the maximum safe storage time of 155mm artillery shells used by his Department and *(b)* the recommended safe storage time; if he will list *(a)* and *(b)* for (i) 1980, (ii) 1985 and (iii) 1990; and what factors underly differences between *(a)* and *(b)* for each year. [10653]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Since 1980, all 155mm ammunition procured by the MOD is designed to provide a service life of 10 years. No distinction is made between maximum and recommended safe storage. For each nature, the service life may be extended subject to appropriate tests and trials being concluded satisfactorily.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what agreements his Department and its executive agencies have with companies for the provision of mobile and car phones; and if he will list the companies having these contracts, the duration of the contracts, the number of phones covered by each agreement and the cost to public funds of each agreement; [9734]

(2) what costs his Department and executive agencies have incurred as a result of withdrawing from contracts under which mobile phones are provided; and if he will list the companies concerned; [9736]

(3) what procedures were used by his Department in awarding contracts for the supply of mobile and car phones to his Department and its executive agencies; and which companies were involved in tendering for these contracts. [9735]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answers 17 January 1996]:* My Department has an enabling arrangement with Motorola Telco to provide mobile and car phones. A number of our agencies in the UK make use of this enabling arrangement which runs from 1 October 1994 to 30 November 1996. A total of 554 phones has been supplied via this arrangement. The total cost to public funds, which would include rental and call charges, is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

My Department is not liable to cancellation charges under its enabling arrangement if the contract for an individual phone is cancelled after 12 months. The minimum contract period is twelve months. No figures are held centrally for the number of cancellations and this information could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

My Department's enabling arrangement with Motorola Telco was awarded after a public competition under EC rules during 1994 which included Hutchison Ltd. and Vodaphone Ltd. A fresh public competition under EC rules is underway for a new enabling arrangement to take effect from 1 December 1996.

Where these matters fall to the chief executives of my Department's agencies, I have asked the chief executives to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from J. R. Drew to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 January 1996:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about mobile phones and car phones in Defence agencies.

The Army Base Repair Organisation (ABRO), an agency with some 3,300 staff spread over 20 sites throughout the UK, currently has agreements covering the use of 23 mobile phones. The majority of the phones were procured using the rates centrally negotiated with Motorola Ltd. by the MOD Information and Communications Services. Some ABRO workshops have sought to obtain value for money by using their local purchase authority to negotiate their own rates. One took advantage of preferential rates already negotiated by other MOD users, single tender action was taken by another and one ran a competition involving the Mobile Phone Centre, Colchester, Mercury, Vodaphone and the winners, Securicor Cellular Services.

A summary of the arrangements within ABRO is provided on the attached sheet. The agreements cover a variety of hardware and tariffs, depending on the individual requirements of each part of the business. Total costs only have been provided in order to avoid breaching commercial confidences with the individual suppliers.

None of the contracts are for fixed periods and no costs have been incurred as result of withdrawing from contracts.

I hope that this is helpful.

Army base repair organisation: mobile phone agreements

Number of phones	*Agreement with*	*Cost of purchase and connection (VAT exc.)*	*Rental costs to date in FY 1995–96 (VAT exc.)*
16	Motorola Ltd. through MOD Information and Communication Services		
5	Motorola Ltd.—locally negotiated	£2,645	£2,535
1	BT Mobile—locally negotiated		
1	Securicor Cellular Services—locally negotiated		

Letter from Kevin Goad to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 January 1996:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the use of mobile telephones as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency (ABSDA).

I confirm that within UK all mobile telephones owned by ABSDA have been purchased under central MoD arrangements negotiated by Director General Information and Communication Services (DGICS). I am sure that Directorate will be responding to your question with regard to that contract.

To address specially, the points you raise:

First, in answer to your enquiry about the provision of mobile telephones, ABSDA currently has 13 units, purchased under the central MoD agreement, with Motorola Telecommunications. A further 15 telephones were purchased locally in Germany (for use by staff in the ABSDA depots in Germany) through Headquarters United Kingdom Support Command (Germany) as the UK central agreement does not cover telephone equipments that are compatible with the German telecommunications system. As with the UK purchases, however, ABSDA was not involved with the tendering process. The cost to ABSDA of these agreements is:

a. 13 Mobile phones in UK purchased from Motorola Telecommunications annual charges: £5100 per annum

b. 15 Mobile phones purchased in Germany from Hutchinson Mobilfunk: £4310 per annum

Secondly, regarding your point about the cost of withdrawal from contracts. As we have not withdrawn from any of our contracts to date, no costs have been incurred.

I hope that this reply answers your questions. If you require further clarification or information please come back to me.

Letter from Danny Thomas to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 January 1996:

You asked the Secretary of State for Defence what procedures were used by his Department in awarding contracts for the supply of mobile and car phones to his Department and its executive agencies; and which companies were involved in tendering for these contracts. I am replying on behalf of the Chief Executive of the Defence Accounts Agency who is away at present.

All contracts for the provision of mobile phones used by the Defence Accounts Agency were negotiated centrally within the Ministry of Defence and I understand that these will be covered in the reply from the Minister of State for Defence Procurement.

Letter from Danny Thomas to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 January 1996:

You asked the Secretary of State for Defence what costs have been incurred to his Department and executive agencies as a result of withdrawing from contracts under which mobile phones are provided. I am replying on behalf of the Chief Executive of the Defence Accounts Agency who is away at present.

The Defence Accounts Agency has not incurred any charges as a result of cancelling any contract or agreement with a mobile phone supplier. But all contracts for the provision of mobile phones used by the Defence Accounts Agency were negotiated centrally within the Ministry of Defence and I understand that these will be covered in the reply from the Minister of State for Defence Procurement.

Letter from Danny Thomas to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 January 1996:

You asked the Secretary of State for Defence what agreements his Department and its executive agencies have with companies for the provision of mobile car phones; and if he would list the companies having these contracts, the duration of the contract, the number of phones covered by each agreement and the cost to public funds of each agreement. I am replying on behalf of the Chief Executive of the Defence Accounts Agency who is away at present.

The six mobile phones held by the Defence Accounts Agency were purchased centrally within the Ministry of Defence and I understand that these will be covered in the reply from the Minister of State for Defence Procurement.

Letter from Paul Altobell to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 January 1996:

I am replying to your three recent questions to the Secretary of State for Defence about mobile phones as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Analytical Services Agency.

The Defence Analytical Services Agency has no agreement with any companies for the provision of mobile and car phones. The Defence Analytical Services Agency has incurred no costs as a result of withdrawing from contracts under which mobile phones are provided.

The Defence Analytical Services Agency has awarded no contracts for the supply of mobile and car phones. The Agency would follow the procedures laid down by our parent Department (MoD) should such a contract arise.

Letter from Andrew Roache to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 January 1996:

As Chief Executive of the Defence Animal Centre (DAC) I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence regarding what costs his Department and its executive agencies have incurred as a result of withdrawing from contracts under which mobile phones are provided; and a list of those companies concerned.

The DAC has no involvement with the arrangements required should it be necessary to withdraw from such a contract and therefore is not aware of the costs involved or the companies concerned. This matter is dealt with by Divisional Headquarters at York.

Letter from Andrew Roache to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 January 1996:

As Chief Executive of the Defence Animal Centre (DAC), I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence concerning what agreements his Department and its executive agencies have with companies for the provision of mobile and car phones; the list of the companies having these contracts, the duration of the contracts, the number of phones covered by each agreement and the cost to public funds of each agreement.

The DAC has no involvement with agreements regarding the provision of mobile and car phones and consequently has no knowledge of the companies who have the contracts, their duration, the number of phones covered or the cost to public funds of each agreement. This matter is dealt with by Divisional Headquarters at York.

Letter from Andrew Roache to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 January 1996:

As Chief Executive of the Defence Animal Centre (DAC) I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence with regard to what procedures his Department and its executive agencies use in awarding contracts for the supply of mobile and car phones to his Department and executive agencies; and the names of the companies concerned in tendering for these contracts.

The DAC has no involvement with the awarding of such contracts and is not aware of the companies concerned in tendering for these contracts. This matter is dealt with by Divisional Headquarters at York.

Letter from M. J. Roycroft to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 January 1996:

I am replying to your Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence about mobile and car telephones, as they are used in the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency, in my capacity as its Chief Executive.

This Agency currently has 5 separate agreements, all with Motorola Telecommunications Limited, covering a total of 6 telephones. Each agreement is for an initial contract period of 12 months, after which withdrawal can occur at any time without a cost penalty. The costs of each agreement vary, dependent upon the number of calls made, the date that the telephone was first taken into use and the purchase price of the equipment. For this Agency, the costs to public funds, inclusive of VAT, are as follows:

Agreement 1 (2 telephones) : £3,068.28

Agreement 2 (1 telephone) : £455.61

Agreement 3 (1 telephone) : £1,643.67

Agreement 4 (1 telephone) : £649.21

Agreement 5 (1 telephone) : £892.87

To date we have not withdrawn from any mobile telephone contracts and therefore no costs have been incurred.

All our mobile telephones are ordered from a contract let by MOD's Director General, Information and Communications Services, whose organisation determines the procedures for the awarding and tendering of such contracts.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 January 1996:

I am replying on behalf of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) to your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence about agreements with companies to provide mobile and car telephones, the procedures used to award initial contracts and the costs in subsequently withdrawing from these agreements. I am answering all three questions in this letter.

In April 1993 the Defence Research Agency (DRA) sought quotations for the provision of mobile telephones from industry in line with MOD Procurement Procedures. The following companies were invited to tender for the contract. In the event only the first four responded.

Mercury Mobile

British Telecom

Direct Mobile Communications

Vodac

Motorola

Hutchison

Cellular Communications Corp. plc

Tenders were evaluated against the published Statement of Requirements (SOR) and a 3 year enabling contract was eventually awarded to Mercury Mobile.

On its formation in April 1995 DERA inherited a range of additional mobile telephone contracts and related support services from organisations joining the DRA that were already in place. These telephones had been supplied as a result of many competitive tender procurements for small numbers of telephones with the exception of a single tender to Hutchison who was the sole known supplier providing access to the Orange Network at the time of purchase. The companies listed below (but excluding Mercury Mobile and Hutchison) were invited to tender for each of these individual procurements. These existing contracts will continue for the useful life of the mobiles or until a more cost effective means of service provision is identified.

In summary DERA now therefore has in place the following contracts at the costs shown:

Supplier	*Number of mobiles*	*Purchase cost* £	*Running costs* £
Mercury Mobile	675	198,000	424,000
British Telecom	63	—	28,000
Hutchison	26	—	11,000
Motorola	28	—	20,000
Orange	14	—	7,000
Talkland	3	—	1,000
Mobile Telecom	4	—	2,000
Peoples Phone	2	—	700
Vodafone	19	—	6,000
Uniqueair	2	—	700

Our policy is not to withdraw from contracts until any guaranteed rental period with the original supplier has expired thus ensuring there is a cost benefit for DERA in making a change. At that stage the only costs incurred for withdrawing from contracts have been for the connection charge to transfer existing mobiles from one service supplier to another. The connection charge is £45 per telephone and a total cost of £1,600 has been incurred for such changes during the last three years.

I hope this is helpful.

Letter from T. McG. Brown to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 January 1996:

I am replying to your three Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence about mobile telephones as I am responsible for their procurement and use within my agency, the Defence Postal & Courier Services Agency (DPCSA).

Taking each question in turn, the information you have requested is as follows:

PQ9927G—DPCSA currently operates 47 mobile phones, the large majority of which are used by Defence Couriers and drivers of MoD Mail Service delivery vans. DPCSA operates mobile phones under three agreements. Most are supplied by Peoples Phone, but we also use a small number of phones from BT Cellphone Services and Mercury One-2-One. The agreements are not fixed term. They continue until either DPCSA or the supplier chooses to terminate

them. The cost to public funds is dependent on the use of each individual phone. The rates charged are those available under existing MoD contracts.

PQ9928G—DPCSA has not incurred any costs as a result of withdrawing from a mobile phone contract.

PQ9930G—DPCSA obtained phones from Peoples Phone after soliciting tenders from 4 companies, Peoples Phone, Vodaphone Centre, Hutchinson Telecom and Tancroft Phones. Normal MoD tendering rules applied. BT Cellphone Services and Mercury one-2-One phones were obtained under individual contracts as required. Any future requirements will be met from an MoD enabling contract established to allow MoD Agencies and other organisaitons to obtain mobile phones at preferential rates.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Letter from M. G. R. Hodson to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 January 1996:

I am replying to your Questions (9927G, 9928G and 9930G) to the Secretary of State for Defence, about mobile telephones, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Transport and Movements Executive Agency (DTMX).

A new contract for three mobile telephones has been let through the Ministry of Defence Information and Communciations Services (MOD ICS), to Motorola. This is an existing MOD contract which is due to run out during March 1996, however, existing subscribers will not be affected. The estimated costs over a one year period are in the region of £850.

DTMX cancelled an existing contract with Hutchison Telecom, at the end of a contract period, having given the required notice. The four telephones owned by DTMX will be withdrawn on 28 January and replaced by three new telephones supplied by Motorola.

As I have pointed out above, DTMX used the existing MOD ICS contract and was not involved in any tendering process. I view this switch of contracts as good housekeeping, bringing as it will, a financial saving.

Letter from Keith Ellender to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 January 1996:

I am replying to your Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence about mobile and car phones, as these matters fall within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Disposal Sales Agency.

My Agency has two agreements for the provision of mobile phones. The agreement with Hutchison covers 8 phones, costing £25 each per month plus calls, less a 10% overall discount. The agreement with Motorola covers a phone, costing £22.50 per month plus calls, less a 10% discount on calls only. Both contracts are ongoing. My Agency does not have any agreements for the provision of car phones.

My Agency has not withdrawn from any contracts under which mobile phones are provided.

The contracts to supply mobile phones to my Agency were awarded by the Directorate General Information and Communications Services (DGICS). They will be able to advise on what procedures were used and which companies were involved in tendering for the contracts.

Letter from G. H. Wilson to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 January 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence concerning agreements with companies for the provision of mobile and car phones as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of this Agency.

My Agency has no agreements with companies for the provision of mobile and car phones.

Letter from M. R. Pack to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 January 1996:

1. Your Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence about the provision of mobile and car telephones and related contractual aspects have been referred to the Chief Executive of the Hydrographic Office for reply. Unfortunately Admiral Essenhigh is, at present, absent from the Office on official duty so I am replying to you on his behalf.

2. In so far as the Hydrographic Office Defence Agency is concerned we currently possess a total of 15 mobile telephones and 2 car telephones. The phones were procured from British Telecom (2 mobile phones) and Motorola (13 mobile phones and 2 car phones). The estimated costs of procurement was £360 in respect of British Telecom and £2,300 in respect of Motorola. These phones, apart from the cost of purchase obviously incur both a line rental charge and a cost in respect of usage. It is estimated that in the current financial year (FY 95/96) the rental and usage charges will amount to £8,600; we estimate this total would be apportioned as follows:

(i) 2 x BT mobile phones—£3,500

(ii) 13 x Motorola mobile phones—£4,020

(iii) 2 x Motorola car phones—£1,080

3. In purchasing these phones the Hydrographic Office did not enter into any contractual arrangements with either British Telecom or Motorola.

4. Turning now to the questions about withdrawing from mobile phone contracts, no such contracts have been entered into by the Hydrographic Office and consequently we have not withdrawn from any contract.

5. Finally in regard to your questions about the procedures used in awarding contracts for the supply of phones, the Hydrographic Office did not enter into any form of competitive tender action. The cost of the equipment fell within local purchase arrangements.

6. I hope this information has been of assistance.

Letter from A. W. Pollard to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19th January 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence Procurement about various aspects of the hire by executive agencies of mobile and car phones. As Chief Executive this falls within my area of responsibility for the Logistic Information Systems Agency (LISA).

LISA currently hires a total of 37 mobile phones. Details of the number of telephones hired from specific companies and their respective costs are attached at Annex A. No contracts are negotiated on a "fixed-period" basis. Therefore no costs have been incurred as a result of withdrawal from contracts. LISA adopts the standard procedures contained within the Director General Information and Communications Systems (DGICS) Catalogue to procure its requirements.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Annex A: LISA mobile phone hire

Serial	*Hire company*	*Numbers hired*	*Cost per month £*
1	4U Ltd.	6	25
2	British Telecom	1	12
		1	27
3	Peoples Phone	4	53
4	Motophone	13	15
5	Hutchinson	1	11
6	Motorola	11	22
Total	6	37	165

Letter from J. C. R. Hunt to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 January 1996:

I am replying to your Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence about the provision and use of mobile and car phones in the Meterological Office as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Agency.

I attach at Annex details of our current contracts for the provision of these services. The majority of the equipment is needed to gather observations and to maintain operational services. Since April 1995 only two contracts have been terminated. During 1994–95 five were terminated and in the previous year three. The penalty in each case has been no more than £67.50 per mobile.

With the exception of a very small number of specialised equipments the Meteorological Office procures its mobile phones under a contract negotiated centrally by the DGICS organisation in the Ministry of Defence.

We currently have agreements with 5 (five) companies:

Annex: Mobile phones

Hire company	*Numbers hired*	*Cost per annum £*	*Total cost per annum £*
BT Cellnet	10	270.00	3,700.00
Vodafone Government	6	270.00	1,620.00
Hutchison	5	270.00	1,350.00
Phones 4U	3	270.00	810.00
Motorola	59	270.00	15,930.00
Motorola	4	138.00	552.00
Motorola	2	162.00	324.00
Total			23,286.00

All contracts are for a minimum of one year.

Letter from A. J. Hoon to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 January 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about costs incurred as a result of withdrawal from mobile telephone contracts as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Military Survey Defence Agency.

Military Survey has incurred no costs as a result of withdrawing from mobile telephone contracts.

Letter from A. J. Hoon to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 January 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the procedures used in the award of contracts to supply mobile telephones as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Military Survey Defence Agency.

Recent purchases of mobile telephones have been made from the selection available in the catalogue issued by the central MOD authority responsible for telecommunications equipment. The catalogue is produced following a competitive process to identify the most cost-effective solutions to a range of requirements.

Earlier purchases were made after locally arranged competitive tendering with a number of suppliers. A list of companies invited to tender is attached. I regret that the list may not be exhaustive as details of tendering exercises are not normally retained for longer than three years.

Military Survey Defence Agency

List of Companies invited to tender for mobile telephones

1. Alpha Mega Services
2. Axon Systems
3. British Telecom
4. Callmaster Telecommunications
5. Ford Airtime Operations
6. Hutchinson Telecom
7. Peoples Phone
8. Vodaphone

Letter from A. J. Hoon to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 January 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about agreements for the provision of mobile telephones as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Military Survey Defence Agency.

Military Survey has no agreements as such with mobile telephone companies as all instruments have been purchased outright. Information regarding the contracts for telephones in use in the Agency is attached. You also asked for details of the costs involved; I regret that it is not our practice to divulge this commercially sensitive information.

Military Survey Defence Agency Details of Mobile Telephone Contracts

Serial	*Supplier*	*Quantity*
1.	British Telecom	2
2.	British Telecom	4
3.	British Telecom	4
4.	Callmaster Telecommunications	16
5.	Motorola[1]	7
6.	Motorola[1]	14
7.	Motorola[1]	3
8.	Motorola[1]	5
9.	Vodaphone	5

[1] Procured via central MOD catalogue.

Letter from W. S. Graham to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 January 1996:

1. I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence, that sought details of procedures used by the "Naval Aircraft Repair Organisation (NARO)" in awarding contracts for the supply of mobile and car phones as the matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the NARO.

2. A number of local companies are approached by phone for costs and the one with the best deal at the time is selected.

3. Only 2 companies have been used to date:

Hutchison Telecom and The Peoples Phone Company.

Letter from W. S. Graham to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 January 1996:

1. I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence, that asked for details of costs, if any, incurred by the "Naval Aircraft Repair Organisation (NARO)" as a result of withdrawing from contracts under which mobile phones have been provided as the matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the NARO.

2. No costs incurred.

Letter from A. D. Ferguson to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 18 January 1996:

I am replying on behalf of the Chief Executive of the Naval Recruiting and Training Agency (NRTA) to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about what agreements the Naval Recruiting and Training Agency (NRTA) has with companies for the provision of mobile and car phones; a list of those companies, the duration of the contracts, the number of phones covered by each agreement and the cost to public funds of each agreement.

The details requested are as follows:

Company	*Duration of contract*	*Number of telephones*	*Annual cost £*
BT	12 months	4	948
Cellnet	12 months	15	1,668
Cell Phone Direct	12 months	1	201
Mercury	12 months	1	153

Company	Duration of contract	Number of telephones	Annual cost £
Mercury	12 months	1	457
Talkland	12 months	7	1,914
Vodac	12 months	3	864

You will also wish to be aware that the NRTA has 80 telephones that were provided by MOD DGICS prior to Agency status at a total cost of £26456 per annum.

Letter from A. D. Ferguson to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 18 January 1996:

I am replying on behalf of the Chief Executive of the Naval Recruiting and Training Agency (NRTA) to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about what procedures were used in awarding contracts for the supply of mobile and car phones to the NRTA; and asking for a list of the companies involved.

The procedures used were a mixture of competitive tendering under government contracting rules or by local purchase action as appropriate. The companies involved were as follows:

BT

Cellnet

Cell Phone Direct

Mercury

Talkland

Vodac

Letter from A. D. Ferguson to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 18 January 1996:

I am replying on behalf of the Chief Executive of the Naval Recruiting Agency (NRTA) to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about what costs NRTA has incurred as a result of withdrawing from contracts under which mobile phones are provided; and the companies concerned.

We have withdrawn from one agreement to date, with Talkland. There was no cost penalty. None of the agreements will attract a cost on withdrawal provided the required notice is given, 30 days in the majority of cases and 3 months the remainder.

Letter from B. Raine to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 January 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence/Her Majesty's Government about mobile car phones as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of Queen Victoria School.

We have had no agreement with any company to provide a mobile and car phone, nor have we awarded any contracts. Therefore, we have incurred no costs as a result of withdrawing from contracts under which mobile phones are provided nor were we involved in any procedures to award such contracts.

Letter from R. H. Kyle to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 January 1996:

You asked the Secretary of State for Defence a number of questions concerning agreements and related costs of providing mobile and car telephones. I am replying as the Chief Executive of the Royal Air Force Maintenance Group Defence Agency.

I understand that you will be receiving a separate reply direct from the Secretary of State covering mobile and car telephones which have been provided under departmental arrangements. This reply therefore only covers those instruments which have been obtained under delegated contractual authority. You will appreciate that my Agency comprises a number of Royal Air Force stations across the country, each of which enjoys the appropriate delegated authority in its own right. For simplicity of presentation a consolidated response to your various questions has been prepared and is attached to this letter.

I hope that this information is helpful.

Royal Air Force Maintenance Group Defence Agency Mobile and Car Telephones

1. Companies from which mobile and car telephones in use have been obtained:

British Telecom

Challenger Communications Ltd.

Hutchison Telecommunications

People's Phone

Roadphone

Securicor

2. Challenger Communications Ltd. has provided 4 mobile telephones on a short term contract for a specific operational requirement. All other telephones, which have been purchased, involve running contracts and related costs for line rental.

3. The total number of telephones concerned is 56. The total of instrument purchase costs is £724.38 (inc. VAT). The total of monthly rental costs is £1,205.29 (inc. VAT).

4. No costs have been incurred as a result of withdrawing from contracts.

5. Where mobile telephones have been obtained under delegated contractual authorities the standard published Royal Air Force and Ministry of Defence procedures have been followed.

6. The following companies have been involved in tendering:

British Telecom

Challenger Communications Ltd.

Co-Channel Elec Ltd.

Hutchison Telecommunications

K - Phones

LEBA Engineering

Mercury Telecommunications

People's Phone

Roadphone

Securicor

Letter from P. C. Ayee to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 January 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the costs that have been incurred as a result of withdrawing from contracts under which mobile phones are provided, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Royal Air Force Signals Engineering Establishment Defence Agency.

No costs have been incurred by the Agency as the result of withdrawing from contracts under which mobile phones have been provided

Letter from P. C. Ayee to Mr. Brian Dohohoe, dated 19 January 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the agreements his Department and its Executive Agencies have with companies for the provision of mobile and car phones, the companies having those contracts, the duration of the contracts, the number of phones covered by each agreement and the cost to public funds of each agreement, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Royal Air Force Signals Engineering Establishment Defence Agency.

This Agency has annual rental agreements with Hutchinson Telecom for 4 mobile phones at a cost of £3600 per annum and Peoples Phone Company for 18 phones at a cost of £5040 per annum. All the contracts are of one year's duration with an option of cessation after 3 months notice.

Letter from P. C. Ayee to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 January 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the procedures were used in awarding contracts for the supply of mobile and car phones, and what companies were involved in tendering for those contracts, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Royal Air Force signals Engineering Establishment Defence Agency.

Standard Ministry of Defence procedures for the procurement of mobile phones were used. The companies involved in tendering for the contracts were British Telecom, Hutchinson Telecom and The Peoples' Phone Company.

Letter from A. A. Nicholson to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 January 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the procedures used in awarding contracts for the supply of mobile and car phones.

The contracts to supply mobile phones to the Royal Air Force Training Group Defence Agency are dealt with centrally within the Ministry of Defence.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Agency's owner, the Air Officer Commanding-in-chief Personnel and Training Command.

Letter from I. S. Mitchelson to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 January 1996:

I am replying to your questions to the Secretary of State for Defence about provision of mobile and car phones in so far as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of Service Children's Schools (North West Europe) Agency.

Service Children's Schools (NWE) currently operates 7 mobile phones. These were procured on our behalf by Headquarters United Kingdom Support Command (Germany), who are responsible for the provision of telecommunications equipment and related services within British Forces Germany. This is the normal procedure, and for the Agency to seek to set up separate arrangements for such limited requirements would not make any real sense. This of course means the Agency has not withdrawn from any mobile or car phone contracts.

I understand that the Department will cover the procurement arrangements.

Letter from J. R. Prince to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 19 January 1996:

I am replying to your questions to the Secretary of State for Defence about the use of mobile and car phones, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Army Technical Support Agency (ATSA).

The information you have requested is set out below (please note that it relates to mobile phones only; ATSA does not possess any car phones):

Company	*Number of phones*
Callmaster	5
Motorola	23
Unique Air	9
Hutchinson Telecom	3
Total	40

The cost of the phones amounted to £3,100, and the estimated annual cost, including line rental, calls and VAT is £13,700. Lines are rented from BT, Motorola, Unique Air and Hutchinson Telecom.

The majority of the phones were purchased through existing Departmental enabling agreements, which were approved only after competitive tendering had been undertaken. Those agreements that have been made within the last 12 months require 1 years notice to terminate; those more than 12 months old require 90 days notice. One agreement has been terminated, with Unique Air, incurring a charge of £30.

Training

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 9 January, *Official Report*, column *101*, what is his calculation of the sums spent by regiments and groups other than his Department on training for each service in each of the past five years. [9725]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* Any such expenditure, if it occurs, would be from non-public funds and therefore would fall outside the accountability of my Department. Consequently, the information requested is not collected centrally.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 269**

SESSION 1994–95

9th January—19th January 1996

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This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

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Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Comm = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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